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THE WAY OF LIFE
VOL. II
THE LORD'S PRAYER
AND
THE TEACHINGS OF JESUS

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THE WAY OF LIFE

VOL. II
THE LORD'S PRAYER
AND
THE TEACHINGS OF JESUS

BY
JAMES DRUMMOND

LL.D., LITT.D., D.D.

LONDON
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1918

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PRAYER

Αὐτὸ τὸ πνεῦμα ὑπερεντυγχάνει στεναγμοῖς ἀλαλήτοις.

TEACH me to pray. My lips are dumb ;
I know not what I need.
But let thy Holy Spirit come,
And for me intercede.

I long, with inarticulate sigh,
For holiness and love,
I would adore thee ever nigh,
So close, yet far above.

Thou sitt'st enthroned on star and sun ;
Thy thoughts are wondrous deep ;
And yet in every contrite one
Thou dost thy temple keep.

O blest communion, pure and still,
From sin and passion free,
Come, raise my aspirations, till
I lose myself in thee.

O Father, may thy hallowed name
Due reverence find within,
That, purified from spot and blame,
Thy likeness I may win.

To seek thy kingdom, do thy will,
That be my daily prayer ;
To trust thy love, to praise thee still,
Be this my only care.

Then shall thy peace with me abide,
And calm the restless heart ;
Whatever sorrows may betide,
From thee no more I part.

JAMES DRUMMOND.

Oxford, *January*, 1918.

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Ἐγὼ εἰμι ἡ ὁδὸς καὶ ἡ ἀλήθεια καὶ ἡ ζωή.

Ὁ λόγος ὃν ἀκούετε οὐκ ἔστιν ἐμὸς ἀλλὰ τοῦ πέμψαντός
με πατρός.

Οὐ πᾶς ὁ λέγων μοι κύριε, κύριε, εἰσελεύσεται εἰς τὴν
βασιλείαν τῶν οὐρανῶν, ἀλλ' ὁ ποιῶν τὸ θέλημα τοῦ
πατρός μου.

Ἐγὼ ἐν μέσῳ ὑμῶν εἰμι ὡς ὁ διακονῶν.

INTRODUCTION

A PRAYER which flows from a man's heart contains the deepest elements of his religion. In speaking to our fellow men we often express our formal thought rather than our living faith, and we aim rather to instruct the understanding of others than to lay bare our own souls. But when we address God in prayer, we uncover the hidden fountains of our being, and disclose the ideas and aspirations by which we desire our lives to be ruled.

If this be so, we may expect to find in that prayer which is significantly known as the 'Lord's Prayer,' and which alone is used by all classes of Christians, the very essence of Christ's religion. In these simple words, which are as familiar to us as the rudiments of knowledge, we may look for some of the world's grandest thoughts and loftiest hopes.

As though Christendom had instinctively felt this to be the case, it has reverently retained the Lord's Prayer, even where it stands in rebuking contrast to prayers of a far different type; and if, guided by a holy sympathy with Christ, we constrain our attention to rest upon those words which we so often repeat, but of which we so seldom think, we shall see farther than we have hitherto done into his spirit, and understand better some of his great conceptions of life and duty.

CHAPTER I

GOD OUR FATHER

THE opening words, though so few and unpretending, naturally suggest to us two important subjects of thought. The term 'Father' expresses a relation, and implies not only the fatherhood of God, but the sonship of man. These are perhaps not so much two subjects as the same subject regarded from two different points of view, and our thoughts upon them will necessarily run into one another. Still they require a separate treatment, and the former will engage our attention in the present chapter.

The doctrine of the fatherly character of God lies at the centre of the Christian revelation. Around this the other great doctrines of Christianity cluster, and from it they draw their vitality. Clearly to apprehend this doctrine is to hold the master-key which unlocks the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, and admits the worshipper to the richest treasures of the Spirit. To explain it away, or to see it obscurely, or to thrust it into a subordinate position, is to miss the guiding light and the vivifying power of our religion. Its simplicity may often cause us to overlook it; its universal acceptance, at least in profession, deprives it of

the charm of novelty and the excitement of controversy ; and its sublimity may, alas ! tempt us to be sceptical of its truth. But when it was fresh in the minds of men, when great issues depended on its acceptance or rejection, when hearts made holy bore witness to its power, and those who had been redeemed by it from the ghostly terrors of superstition saw it as a beam of glory shining out of darkness, ' Our Father who art in heaven ' was the rapt language of devotion and faith, and to Him who bore that dearest and most sacred name life was not too much to offer as a sacrifice of love.

What, then, is this doctrine to which we ascribe so much importance ? The term Father probably suggests more than we can analyse or define. Nevertheless, we may dwell upon a few simple and familiar thoughts, thoughts, however, which are not the less momentous because, like warmth and light, they are within the reach of all.

The first and most obvious thought which occurs to us is that, if God be our Father, he must, through all the pain and sorrow of the world, rule over it with a wise and tender care. Events do not drift on under the impulse of a blind and aimless force, subject only to occasional interference or interposition of a supernatural power ; but the Divine goodness is perpetually blending with human affairs, superintending them with a controlling love, and silently working for the fulfilment of some gracious plan. There are comparatively few who deny this ; but are there many who profoundly believe it ? For how lightly we seem to regard it ! Yet what faith can be more wonderful, more calculated to awe and subdue and at the same time elevate and ennoble the mind ? Its meaning may

come home to us more forcibly if, instead of speaking of the universe, which is too vast and indefinite greatly to affect our hearts, we confine our attention to a narrower range. Can anything be more sublime than the conviction that day and night over our own country a sleepless love is watching ; that more real than its busy traffic, its proud warehouses, its wealthy mansions, is the invisible presence of One who is waiting for his children's worship ; and that in the midst of its sin and coarseness and unbelief there is the unwearying pity and sorrowing affection of One who desires not the death of a sinner, but rather that he should repent and live ?

But we must go a step further. We must not suppose that God is far from any one of us, and, like a beneficent monarch, loves his people in the mass, and makes wise laws for their guidance, but knows and cares nothing for the individuals of whom his people are composed. A wise father will indeed have general rules by which to govern his household ; but he knows his children one by one, and loves them with an impartial affection ; he sorrows for their separate pains, and has regard to the character and necessities of each. And so the heavenly Father is nearer to each of us than in the rising sun or the falling shower ; the very hairs of our heads are all numbered. He cares for each single life with paternal solicitude, and amid the countless millions of his creatures not one is forgotten. A heartfelt faith in this fatherly love changes the whole aspect of life. It smooths away anxiety and fretfulness ; for we know that boundless power and unerring wisdom will direct our future. It makes every joy more delightful, and

sheds a mellow light into the gloom of grief. Nature becomes clothed with more than natural beauty, and through flower and tree, through mountain and cloud, through waving corn and blushing fruit God's goodness shines, and earth's fairest scenes are but the changing symbols of an eternal beauty apprehended by the worshipping soul. Blessed is the man who feels this love wherever he goes, and owns in his heart the presence of him whom the heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain.

More, however, than his constant loving-kindness is implied when we speak of God as our Father. Father and son partake in some measure of the same attributes, and God, as the Father of men, has created them in his image, and endowed them with faculties which have a faint resemblance of his own. He stands to us in the same relation as we bear to little children, from whom we may be indefinitely removed in intelligence and goodness, but who nevertheless have an intelligence and goodness essentially the same as ours. He puts his own Spirit into the soul of man, and causes a ray from his own wisdom, holiness, and love to shine within the heart. It is thus that he brings us into fellowship with himself, and makes us 'partakers of the divine nature.' When, therefore, we address God as our Father, we regard him not only as a kind Creator and Preserver, but as One whose image ideally at least we bear, and in whose likeness we are to grow for ever. 'Be ye perfect as he is perfect' is a commandment that is applicable only when we think of God as our Father; and it is by virtue of that relation that we are enabled to look up to his infinite perfections as

the aim of our aspirations and the rule of our lives, and that we can in humblest degree become followers of him.

To this doctrine it is objected that God, being infinite, cannot communicate any of his attributes to the finite. He must dwell alone and unapproachable, encompassed with a glory which none may share. This objection, though at first it may seem the dictate of reverence, strikes at the very root of our Christian faith ; for unless he *has* communicated to us in finite measure some of his own attributes, knowledge of him is impossible, and from being our Father and Friend he recedes into impenetrable mystery as the unknown first Cause. The attributes of a Spirit can be understood only through the experiences of our own spirits ; and if our intellectual and moral qualities be totally different in kind from those of God, it is clear that his are attributes for which we possess no name, and of which we cannot form even the most distant conception, and when we speak of his power, holiness, wisdom, and love, we use words without a meaning. Either these, in the sense in which we apply them to our fellow creatures, are the grandest attributes of God, or he is removed from our knowledge, and therefore from our worship ; for no grander attributes are we capable of imagining, and one whom we do not know cannot command our adoration. But what is the ground on which this objection rests ? Is it more than a mere metaphysical subtlety ? Things do not change their nature by becoming infinite. An infinite line is still a line ; and absolute goodness must be still goodness. Of unknown, of inconceivable purity it may be, better, immeasurably better, than any

goodness we have seen or can imagine, but it does not cease to be goodness, and become a thing of which we have no trace in our consciousness, and which we have never seen shining in the chequered rays of human life.

The moral and spiritual attributes of God are capable of an infinite variety of degrees, from their smallest germ up to their full-grown perfection ; but through all their stages their nature remains unchanged, and goodness is the same whether it gives a cup of cold water to the thirsty traveller or plans benevolent laws for the government of a universe. There is no ground, then, for saying that God cannot be our Father in the highest sense. We may believe that God not only loads us with benefits, but communicates a portion of his own being, and that man has within him not only ephemeral fancies and prejudices, but also a beam of the eternal Reason, which is ever struggling against the surrounding darkness, and not only possesses deceitful passions and desires but is prompted also by the Holy Spirit of the everlasting Father. This is the view of God which is most calculated to inspire devotion and draw us to him in prayer. Communion with God is the highest good that can be proposed to human aspiration. To think his thoughts, to feel his love, to show forth his spirit, than this there can be nothing greater. And this is the end which God as our Father proposes to men. He would draw them into oneness with himself, and exalt them to a fellowship of which archangels are not worthy.

This view may enable us in some degree to understand the trials and sufferings which are so apt to seem inconsistent with the loving tenderness of a

father. God sets before men as their supreme end, not happiness, but communion with himself ; not the pampered ease of a favourite animal, but the spirit of a beloved son. He desires indeed that his children should be happy, but rather that they should be brave and faithful in act, earnest in thought, affectionate and loyal in devotion ; and he trains us in the school of hardship that we may be like him, and see him as he is. And after all, it is not earth's trials that shake our faith, but earth's sins. The cross, with its tones of resignation and love, is not so dark a mystery as ungrateful prosperity or successful crime. The soul is braced by the contemplation of triumphant virtue ; and the holy patience which falters not under the keenest distress convinces us that God is near. Only let us believe that God will continually transform us into a nearer resemblance to himself, and that for those who love him all things work together for this end, and then we can look with serenity on the sufferings of human life, and trust that they are the needed discipline of the immortal children of the Highest.

One other thought remains. If God is our Father now, he has been always and everywhere the Father of mankind. There are those who speak as though God's love had been purchased for us by Christ. But God changes not. His Fatherhood resides in his essential being. There was glory to the Father in the beginning, as there is now. His light has lightened every man that was born into the world ; and always, as now, some received his word, and became sons of God. But always, as still, the darkness comprehended not the light, and men quenched in the grossness of

sense the ethereal spark. Christianity, then, has not made God our Father, but revealed him as such, and brought this sublime truth nearer to human consciousness. This is its own profession. It was *because* God loved the world, not in order to love it, that he sent his Son. He is, and ever has been, Love. His Spirit is from everlasting. The life which belongs to his sons is the eternal life which has been for ever with the Father. It is man's heart that needs to be touched ; it is man's soul that needs to be redeemed. Let but the scales fall from his earth-dimmed eyes, and he will see that a Father's love has been around him since first the sun rose upon the infancy of our race.

And now how warm with life is this, the Christian doctrine of God ; how different from all other conceptions of him this faith in the Father. He is not merely the awful Ruler whose methods are revealed by science, the primal Source of power, the presiding Genius of order and law, who dwells in cold seclusion, and is content to appeal through wonderful mechanism to the reason of his creatures. He is not only the Spirit of Beauty that interpenetrates all material things, making nature divine, and deifying, as it were, her gross texture, till a sentiment of worshipping admiration is excited by her varied forms, and she seems to express the very soul of the infinite Artist. Nor is he simply the Lord and Judge of conscience, an ethical Legislator, who enacts laws for the direction of our conduct, and condemns us for our disobedience. He is yet nearer to the heart. He approaches us with more affectionate pleadings than through order and beauty, and law. He comes and makes his abode with us. His word

breathes within. He is our Refuge in trouble, our Help in temptation, our sorrowing Friend in sin, our encouraging Sympathizer in our aspirations and efforts after holiness. He loves each one. He gathers us as children to his bosom. He asks us to bear his image ; and the splendour of stars and sun grows pale beside the glory to be revealed in the immortal soul.

CHAPTER II

MAN, THE SON OF GOD

THE idea of human sonship, though involved in the conception of God as our Father, and resting on that conception as its basis, is yet no later inference or development from the Christian doctrine of God, but has been from the first, however unwilling men have been to receive it, one of the fundamental ideas of Christianity. That Jesus is the Son of God has been cheerfully conceded or zealously maintained by his disciples ; but the counterpart of this truth, that Man is the Son of God, and that the Divine relationship, which has been so clearly revealed in Christ, exists potentially in all, has not been so readily admitted. But Jesus himself, and those of his first followers who saw furthest into his spirit, aimed at nothing less than the embodiment of this idea in human life. To 'become sons of the Father in heaven' is the goal which the great Teacher himself sets before the aspiration of his followers. His Apostles take up the strain, and in glowing language dwell on the inspiring theme. 'Because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts.' 'As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are sons of God.'

‘The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and, if children, then heirs, heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ.’

‘Whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the first-born among many brethren.’

‘Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God.’

Such language as this clearly indicates what a strong hold the idea of sonship had taken of the Christian mind. With higher views of God was combined a new doctrine of human nature ; and while the feeling of man’s sinfulness was intensified, the belief in his Divine capacity and relationship, and the hope of his exaltation, were no less deeply stirred. One writer at least seems almost to struggle for language to express the intimacy of man’s possible communion with God. Nothing short of an absolute sinlessness, God dwelling in man, and man in God, will satisfy his prophetic vision. What, then, is this sonship, which engaged the rapt faith of Apostles, and moved the devout thankfulness of Christ himself ?

Before entering a little more into detail, we may safely say that it implies something in human nature worthy of our profoundest reverence. A creature who can be called in any sense a son of God, though that high distinction may exist only in the ideal perfection of his being, is not to be treated with disrespect, but rather to be regarded with a wondering awe ; for ‘he that honoureth not the Son honoureth not the Father who has sent him.’ On this ground must rest the injunction to ‘honour all men’ ; not that each man by his

individual desert has earned our respect, but on account of the greatness and significance of the powers with which man is endowed, and the solemnity of the relation in which he stands. The degree of honour which we accord to any man must indeed bear some proportion to the fidelity with which he approaches the Divine ideal of his nature ; but supposing that he has disowned his birthright, and desecrated the ' temple of the Holy Spirit,' the body, by making it a habitation for evil spirits, still we are not to join in the dishonour and the desecration, but feel something of that mournful solemnity which steals upon the mind when we stand amid the ruins of departed greatness. This, accordingly, is the sentiment which Christianity has created towards the sinful ; not contempt and loathing, but sorrow and shame. From the same source has sprung the hope of salvation. If we are all children of one Father, then those who have strayed are our own brothers and sisters ; and they are not to be trodden down with a pitiless scorn, but we must endeavour to save them by every sacrifice of love and sympathy. And if it be so with the sinful, how deeply must we reverence those whose consecrated wills have allowed free course to the Divine Spirit, and what limit shall we place to our honour and love for him who, as a unique son, is in the bosom of the Father ?

Examining now more nearly the idea of sonship, we may observe that it implies a spiritual likeness to God. The perfect Son is the express image of the Father ; those who are less richly endowed with the ' spirit of adoption ' more distantly reflect his glory. Man has two natures ; the animal, which connects him with the earth, and forms his

organ of communication with surrounding objects ; and the spiritual, which allies him with a higher realm, and imparts to the lower nature all its value and significance. Of these the former is worn out and perishes ; the latter only is essential and enduring. It is in the spiritual nature, therefore, that we must look for our true and permanent relation. We are not the offspring of the dust, but own a heavenly lineage ; or, in the old words, it is God who has breathed into us the breath of life, and created us in his image.

Our intelligence, our conscience, our higher affections and desires, are in their nature Divine, rills of eternal life flowing from the infinite fullness of God. These are capable of indefinite growth ; and in proportion as they are freed from the entanglements of the lower nature, and cleared from the prejudices and passions which are due to the associations of our earthly existence, they reveal more distinctly the everlasting truth and right. He, then, is most purely a son of God, who has the largest and least clouded wisdom, the most active and penetrating conscience, the most elevated and holy desires. It is, indeed, true that we can never pass the gulf which separates the finite from the infinite, and that our knowledge, power, and goodness must always appear as nothing before God. But this very comparison implies the possession of kindred attributes, and our distant likeness to him is the ground of our adoration. We revere others for manifesting in a higher degree the qualities which we most value in ourselves ; and we pay to God the reverence of worship because the worshipful powers, which in us are so feeble and undeveloped, exist in him in

measureless perfection. Hence arises the prayer that we may be nearer and more like him, holy because he is holy, loving because he is loving, forgiving because he is forgiving, that whatsoever we see our Father doing, we, as docile children, may do likewise. No limit can be set to our growth in the Divine image ; for the soul seems capable of indefinite expansion. Only let us renounce our self-will, and meekly receive that Word which was in the beginning with God, which is indeed nothing less than God himself speaking in the soul of man, and we shall obtain ' authority to become children of God ' ; for his creative Spirit is not far off, and, if we love him, he will come and make his abode with us.

This leads us to refer to the communion between man and God. A son is not denied access to his father's presence, or refused his help and sympathy. The Spirit of the Son in our hearts raises its appeal to the great Parent, ' crying, Abba, Father ' ; and its cry is not unanswered. They that seek shall find ; to those that knock it shall be opened. The angels of God shall ascend and descend upon the son of man. Monitions of duty shall be breathed in his conscience ; visions of truth shall break upon the waiting soul, and the soothing hand of consolation rest upon the troubled heart. Man is perpetually in a more than royal presence ; and there he is asked to show, not the crouching mien of a slave, but the frank look, and the eager, inquiring love, of a child. Who cannot feel that a vivid faith in this relationship, an habitual consciousness of this communion, is the richest possession that a man can have ? It raises him above the world, and makes him independent of the

smiles and frowns of fortune. It saves him from that regard for human opinion which so often makes the character weak and contemptible ; for he who presents his actions daily to be judged by One who cannot err must count it a small thing to be judged by man's judgment. It imparts at once dignity and lowliness ; for he who dwells in the court of the King of kings cannot cringe to any of his fellow subjects, and he who looks up continually to the Holiest and Wisest cannot think of himself more highly than he ought. It gives greater intensity to moral effort, and wakes the power of an all-conquering love, which gradually moulds a man into the likeness of him whom he adores, and raises him nearer to that heavenly condition in which he cannot sin, because he is born of God.

Such is the Christian doctrine of man's sonship, a doctrine above all others fraught with great hopes, and calculated to impart to life a true elevation and refinement. It may be objected to this doctrine, as I have endeavoured to exhibit it, that it is inconsistent with the Christian view of man's sinfulness, and opposed to the observed facts of life. Before considering this objection, I may hazard the general remark, though it may sound paradoxical, that sin is itself a testimony to the greatness of human nature. It is an impressive fact that among all the denizens of earth man alone can sin. He alone is acquainted with moral distinctions, and capable of choosing a course which he knows to be wrong. This shows that there is within him a high spiritual power, flashes of truth and a force of will which speak a noble birth. It is no false imagination which represents the prince

of evil as a fallen archangel, for only one who had stood before the throne of God and honoured his commandments, could have the heart of a rebel ; and he who would reign even in the realm of darkness must have a daring conception and an energy of purpose worthy of a heavenly descent. If, then, we knew nothing of man but that he is a sinner, we should know that there is a mysterious grandeur in his nature, and that problems were presented for his solution which betokened a high order of spiritual endowment. That man *can* sin is a proof of his greatness ; that he *does* sin, an evidence of his perversity and degradation.

This may prepare us for the position that the Christian view of man's sinfulness is not only not opposed to, but is the direct result of, the doctrine of man's sonship, and that when we forget man's filial relation to God we take an erroneous and unworthy view of his sin. Sin is to the Christian heart so inexpressibly sad because it is a perversion of the ends for which man was created, a departure from that path of glory and honour in which he was designed to walk. Show that he was placed on the earth to be the slave of appetite and passion, and we will weep no more for his guilt and folly. In proportion as we regard man as made but a little higher than the brutes, we expect his nature to be brutish, and cease to wonder at his crimes. It is when we remember that he is a son of God that we are overwhelmed with grief at his sinfulness, and the conscience, grown sensitive, tracks the most secret mazes of guilt, and, piercing even to the thoughts and desires of the heart, tries them by a standard of celestial purity. The cynic's contempt for human

nature can never interpret the awful mystery of its sin, and will incur no sacrifice to heal its woes ; the Christian's honour for it sees all the sadness of its perversion, and the perfect Son of God will not refuse, if need be, to wash away with his own blood the stains that defile the souls of his brethren.

We must dwell for a moment on the supposition that, if we desire to touch the heart with sanctifying influences, and save it from the evils by which it is encompassed, we ought to dwell upon its actual deformity rather than on its ideal beauty. To me it seems that men are saved far more by looking up than by looking down, that the attraction of goodness is more powerful than the repulsion of sin, and that the inspiration of love is more mighty for good than the paralysis of fear. Man knows full well his alliance with the powers of evil ; he knows the sentence of the law, ' the soul that sinneth, it shall die ' ; but what he needs to know is that he is a child of God, and that, while he treads this lowly earth, his soul may ascend to heaven, and hold communion with the Lord of all. This is the grand message of Christianity, this its appeal to the famishing heart of man. And wherever this faith penetrated, a new life sprang up, new sanctities were created, new affections burned, new duties were recognized and performed. Old things passed away, corrupt desires fled, and life with God filled and blessed the soul. And still this is the burden of the gospel, ' touch not the unclean thing, and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty.'

We must remark, in conclusion, that the highest view of human nature and destiny is the most

conducive to humility. The more vividly the soul perceives that it ought to be clothed with the saintliness of sons of God, the more profoundly must it feel its ill-desert, and, even with the good, humility must often deepen into shame when the vision of man's ideal greatness is clearest. It is a mock humility, twin sister of conceit, which depreciates endowment in order to magnify performance. He who pours contempt upon his nature, and can see in man only what is mean and coarse, may feed his soul on vanity, and in the guise of lowliness boast of his pre-eminence. But he who knows that he is called to be a son of God forgets to exalt himself, and beholds only what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon him. He is lost in wonder at this amazing gift, and can only bow his head, and confess himself unworthy. On him must rest the reproach and weakness of many an unfaithful act, and to God alone belong the kingdom, the power, and the glory for ever and ever.

CHAPTER III

HOLY CONVERSATION

IN every prayer for a spiritual grace we acknowledge a duty ; and we are guilty of a strange inconsistency, to call it by no harsher name, when we pray for the triumph of the highest principles, and make no attempt to embody them in our lives. As, then, from the opening of the Lord's Prayer we inferred Christ's view of the relation between God and man, so from the succeeding clauses we may gather, in a broad and general way, his conception of human duty. The prayer that God's name may be hallowed, and his will be done, lays upon every one of those who employ it the obligation of sanctifying God in their hearts, and to the utmost of their power obeying his commands. To the first of these clauses we shall now direct our attention.

If we might ascribe a formal plan to a prayer so artless, it would appear not without significance that this clause occupies the foremost place. As in the beatitudes humility stands first in the list of graces, so in our disposition towards God veneration assumes the highest rank. To this it is entitled for more reasons than one. It seems to arise spontaneously, in a healthily constituted nature, from the contemplation of God's holiness,

wisdom, and power. We instinctively feel it to be due from the finite children to the infinite Father, and must admit that there is a moral defect in the character which is never subdued under its spell. It may remain with us constantly, and, unlike our religious emotions, maintain an equable ascendancy under all changes of circumstances. Our passionate love to God, our vivid interest in his worship, our longing for his presence, and the eagerness of our self-devotion may ebb and flow ; but when our hearts are coldest, and our faith in Divine things feeblest, our veneration may be still with us, and save us from thinking lightly of the solemn mysteries above us, or using the name of God with flippancy.

Again, veneration is the root from which other virtues grow. As humility saves us from the error of self-deception, and induces a wise caution in regard to our failings, so veneration draws us towards the perfection we admire, and leads us on to sublimer heights of goodness. Say that a man is wholly destitute of these qualities, and you say that he is shallow and incapable of any real progress. He who bows before nothing superior to himself, but becomes, as it were, his own God, is on the high road to error and sin. His conceptions are founded on falsehood, and his sentiments invert the moral order of his being ; and such seeds can produce only poisonous fruits.

I have spoken as though the words of the prayer contained only a desire that *God* might be revered ; but, we must observe, they extend this reverence to his *name*. We have here the positive side of the old commandment, ‘Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain’ ; and

we are introduced to a general principle by which to regulate the purity of our language. The sensitive reverence which makes us shrink from too familiar a use of the name of God will have a similar effect in relation to all venerable objects. Words which are expressive of great ideas ought to be clothed with a kind of sacredness, and, like ambassadors from a distinguished court, receive a portion of that honour which strictly belongs only to the majesty whose representatives they are.

The reason of this principle is sufficiently obvious. Words are inextricably associated with the ideas of which they are the symbols. They shine by a reflected light, and inevitably carry with them something of the beauty or tenderness or grandeur, or of the meanness or harshness or ludicrousness, of the thoughts which they are intended to express. The mind confers upon the verbal sign the richness or the poverty of its own conceptions and feelings; and the sign, in its turn, reawakens in the mind its former sentiments. There is therefore a natural correspondence between our use of words and the feelings which we entertain towards the objects which they denote. While the mind retains its health, we cannot reverence the object, and treat its name with levity or contempt; we cannot loathe the object, and pronounce its name with any but a mock solemnity. This is a general principle in the employment of language; but if we can recall one or two strongly marked instances, it may assist us more clearly to recognize its truth. Have we not known persons whom we loved or respected, whose names we cannot utter in quite the ordinary tone, because they are so richly laden with treasured associa-

tions ? Have we not all experienced the difficulty of reading with a perfectly steady voice a vivid description of suffering or patient endurance, so powerful has been the effect upon our minds of certain combinations of words ? And who is not familiar with the tone of mingled affection and regret with which departed friends are spoken of ? We may have lost one whose grey hairs went down to the grave when the spirit was matured for higher worlds ; and henceforward his name is preserved as in a temple within us, and suggests the high gifts or genial virtues which once shed their light upon our way. Or we may have been bereaved, not of the full-blown flower of life, but of some little one, whose intelligence was just budding, and whose face was bright with vernal promise, an angel before his time ; and his name, suddenly become a moral power, twines garlands of tenderness and resignation round our hearts, and is never uttered without raising our thoughts to heaven.

So in the religious mind the name of God is indissolubly associated with all that is greatest and most venerable, and cannot be pronounced in the easy tones of indifference. That single word, piously hallowed, restores health to the fainting soul, and is a charm to exorcize the evil spirits of selfish passion. And when the hallowed name is that of Father, with all the associations that Christianity has gathered round it, who can measure its moral influence upon life, or tell how often rebellious thoughts and desires have been abashed by the simple attempt to utter it ? Similarly, in their less degree, other names may reach the deeper springs of our life, till we become possessed of a vocabulary which more than any other

creation of art appeals to our better sensibilities. But, on the other hand, all this elevating power is forfeited by an irreverent use of language. Words heedlessly employed are gradually emptied of their meaning, and cease to awaken in the mind the sentiments with which they ought to be associated. If we accustom ourselves to pronounce the most holy name with haste or thoughtlessness, it will no longer bring before us the transcendent love or omniscient wisdom which it is our privilege to adore, but at most suggest to us some colourless intellectual ideas which have a feeble hold on our lives. And if our heedlessness stoop to the sin of profanity, that name which ought to breathe upon us a spirit of holiness, may fling back upon us our own irreverence, and suggest to us nothing but the coarse company or the blasphemous oath with which it has become connected. So mighty is the influence of words ; so necessary is it for us to take heed that we sin not with our tongue.

It is evidently wrong to use the holy name profanely ; but we may go further and say that the name of God is not to be used too readily even in a religious connexion. It may be replied that feeling gives wings to speech, and the heart is the creator of eloquence. In a certain sense this is true. Once the tongue is fairly loosed, it is feeling which quickens thought and imagination, and lends expressiveness to every tone, and force and fire to the language. Yet it is not true that feeling is always breaking into words. It has a depth where silence is its truest expression. As the most heart-breaking grief cannot pour itself forth in tears, so love, admiration, sympathy are often unspeakable. And especially the finer religious feelings shrink

from a too ready utterance, and reserve themselves for him who needs no words to unveil the heart. It is to be feared that these feelings lose the fine edge of their sensibility if they are much spoken of, and that when the name of God is often in the mouth, even in a pious connexion, it indicates that our devotion is shallow. God's name can be hallowed only by sincerity, and nothing can be more dangerous than the habit of using religious language which outstrips the reality of our thought and feeling. We must be simple and sincere, and rather veil with a modest reticence our devout emotions than suffer them to evaporate in idle words. And then, when any occasion arises, when duty urges us to speak, or the strong religious impulse will not be restrained, our words will be words of power, and our voice have the genuine ring which is imparted by a living emotion.

The danger of too frequent a repetition of holy names in a religious connexion has been frequently exemplified in times of controversy. Theology, from the grandeur of the subjects with which it deals and its intimate association with the holiest feelings, demands, above every other branch of inquiry, reverence, calmness, and self-distrust. That men should be permitted to discuss its high themes at all, and peer with curious eye into the unfathomable sea of glory in which the Eternal dwells, is an amazing gift, and one would expect men, when they approach this highest subject of thought, to remember that they stood within the holy of holies, and that their unclean lips were not fit to speak till their impurities were burned away with a living coal from the altar of God. Yet how little has that great Name, which archangels pronounce

with trembling awe, been hallowed by the tongue of controversy. It has been mingled with the battle-cries of party strife, and bandied to and fro in argument and counter-argument, where passion has triumphed over reason, and love, veneration, and truth have been trodden underfoot.

So, too, other names have become, amid the noise of controversy, like the common things of earth ; and words which ought to raise the mind to its loftiest contemplation and fill the heart with its devoutest feeling, suggest at last only the conflicts of opinion, and the bitterness or the pride of opposition. The questions upon which the religious conceptions of men diverge are indeed legitimate subjects for discussion, and may receive valuable light from a free interchange of thought ; but they ought to be approached with the profoundest reverence, and never treated in such a way as to excite any but the most solemn feelings. To subject the highest themes that can engage our attention to the critical processes of thought is in itself sufficiently trying to our religious sensibility ; never let us learn to treat them with an easy self-assurance, or to pronounce holy names as though they were destitute of meaning. The opinions about which we clamour may have a large admixture of error ; but we never can be wrong in maintaining a reverent thoughtfulness, and in cherishing the spirit, while we seek the form, of truth. Those who hallow the name of God shall see farther into the meaning of that name ; and veneration alone can conduct us to the temple where Divine mysteries are revealed, and the longing soul may rest and see the changeless light for evermore.

We see, then, that a certain reserve is imposed upon us in the use of religious language ; but we must not suppose that this reserve is inconsistent with a devout recognition of God's constant presence. The thought of him may abide ever in the mind, and, far from impairing our reverence, it will light up with a sacred glow the ordinary course of life. It is because he is so near, a Father dwelling with his children, that we owe him such love and veneration. It is because his name is so precious to the soul, so bound up with our most hidden life, that we cannot bear to utter it with levity. The hasty word may make religion common ; the abiding thought constitutes its power.

CHAPTER IV

THE KINGDOM OF GOD

THE simple words 'Thy kingdom come' give rise to important and difficult questions. What is the kingdom of God? What is its fundamental idea? How is it constituted? Of whom is it composed? Where is it to be found? What are its conditions of citizenship? By what laws is it governed, and by whom are its laws administered? What are its relations to other kingdoms? These questions may receive various answers according to men's religious and intellectual culture, and, we may add, according to their interests and prejudices. Admitting the kingdom of God to be a solemn reality, yet men can describe it no further than they have been permitted to explore it, and their views must partake of the imperfection of human observation and thought. It is even possible that their conception of it may be altogether erroneous, and that in endeavouring to conduct others within its borders they may lead them by very circuitous routes, or even in a totally wrong direction. It is only with a grave sense of responsibility that we approach this subject; for whatever may be the kingdom of God for whose advent we pray, it is assuredly the one kingdom

where it is good for men to dwell ; and to be instrumental in misleading the steps of those who seek it would be a grave calamity. And when one finds one's own opinion at variance with that which is generally entertained, it is peculiarly necessary to be cautious ; for nothing is more difficult than to distinguish with coolness and candour between prejudice and reason ; between the lower and the higher view.

Those who look, with the reverence of disciples, to Christ as the greatest of spiritual teachers will endeavour to ascertain his fundamental idea of the kingdom of God. Unfortunately this is not so easy a task as it might appear ; for the evidence on the subject is somewhat conflicting, and although ' the kingdom of God ' or synonymous expressions occur upwards of one hundred times in the four Gospels, yet we are rather informed about the general principles of its government and progress than furnished with any precise notion of its nature and constitution.

In the absence, then, of any precise definition, what is the proper method of ascertaining Christ's fundamental idea ? Is it not patiently to examine every passage in which he speaks of it, and discover, if possible, the one underlying thought which gives the most satisfactory meaning to them all ? And in making such an examination ought we not to attach the most importance to the most original and characteristic sayings, and to make some allowance for figures and modes of expression which were current at the time, or would arise most naturally out of prevailing ideas ? This induction of instances, and weighing of their relative importance, is surely the only legitimate way of conducting our

inquiry. It would, however, be tedious to lay before the reader the details of such an examination, and it must suffice, gathering up results, to suggest a different interpretation from that ordinarily given, and to test its soundness by its application in a few instances.

It is sometimes assumed, as though it were self-evident and beyond the reach of controversy, that by the kingdom of God Christ meant a definite organized society, with himself, in a literal sense, as its king, and regarded this society as the Church which he had come to establish. The evidence on which this supposition rests appears to me to be very slender, and to be largely coloured by ecclesiastical prepossessions. In contrast to this view, I think that the fundamental idea of the kingdom of God is simply that of the reign of God in the human heart.¹ This is what the words themselves naturally suggest; and whatever else may be included, or whatever inferences we may draw, it can hardly be denied that this idea is primary and

¹ So it is understood by Origen, who takes as the key to his interpretation the great saying 'the kingdom of God cometh not with observation, neither shall they say lo! here or lo! there, but the kingdom of God is within you,' so that he who prays that the kingdom of God may come *περὶ τοῦ τὴν ἐν αὐτῷ βασιλείαν τοῦ θεοῦ ἀνατεῖλαι καὶ καρποφορῆσαι καὶ τελειωθῆναι, εὐλόγως εὔχεται*. He meets the objection that one in whom the kingdom is already present ought not to pray for its coming, as though it were not present, by the plea that we are still imperfect, and we pray for the perfection of knowledge, wisdom, and the other virtues. *De Oratione*, 25. Tertullian says, 'Veniat quoque regnum tuum ad id pertinet, quo et Fiat voluntas tua, in nobis scilicet.' *De Oratione*, 5. Even such a Churchman as Cyprian does not suggest that it denotes the Christian Church. *De Oratione Domini*, 13.

essential. Granting that the sovereignty of God is to be found only in some definite community, still a community in which men did not religiously acknowledge that sovereignty could not be spoken of with any propriety as 'the kingdom of God'; and therefore the idea of the Divine rule is more fundamental than that of a Divine society, and we must never, by fixing our attention too exclusively on the latter, allow our vision of the former to be obscured.

If we accept this as our central thought, it is easy to arrive at one or two derivative meanings. The idea of the Divine rule passes by a natural transition into that of the principles and dispositions adapted to or induced by the Divine rule, and hence the kingdom of God may denote the reign of truth and goodness in the human soul. In this sense it is almost synonymous with what, in modern phrase, we call the spiritual or religious life. Adopting this meaning, we can understand the expression '*receive* the kingdom of God,' a form of words which is hardly applicable to a community. We may receive truths or principles; but it would be harsh to speak of receiving the Christian Church. We may explain also in this sense Paul's words, 'The kingdom of God is not in word, but in power,' the religious life does not consist of empty professions, but is a living force in the heart. And again, 'The kingdom of God is not meat and drink, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit'; the religious life is not composed of scruples or want of scruples about particular kinds of food, but of holy and tranquil dispositions. This meaning will be found applicable to a large portion of Christ's teaching, and many of the para-

bles about the kingdom of God admit, as we have seen, of an easy and unforced explanation when we regard them as descriptive of the progress of goodness and truth in the souls of men.

Other modes of expression arise from the fact that the word 'king' is a relative term. Sovereignty implies not only a person by whom it is exercised, but also a people who are subject to it, and generally speaking, a territory in which the people live. Hence we hear of *entering* the kingdom of God, of sitting down, and eating and drinking in it, and even of its keys, as though it were a fortified enclosure with a gate. These expressions might, no doubt, be interpreted as referring to the Christian Church; but if we accept them as referring figuratively to a spiritual realm, the figure is certainly not strained or far fetched. Even in our less imaginative country and age we may speak, without fear of being misunderstood, of entering the kingdom of truth, of passing the narrow gateways of knowledge or goodness, and even of sitting down to participate in the feast of reason. In using such language we do not ascribe locality literally to truth, or propose to enrol our names in the books of a society.

It may be said, however, that God's rule implies necessarily a people whom he rules, and that therefore we arrive, in the most literal sense, at the idea of a community, even if that idea be not the fundamental one. To this it may be replied that, although God's kingdom implies a people over whom he reigns, yet this people need not form a definite organized society; and it is a question which demands careful consideration whether the people of God, 'the sons of the kingdom,' as Christ

calls them, constitute a determinate or an indeterminate community.

The thought of the people of God opens, however, another meaning which the words under discussion may, I think, sometimes contain. A society in which every member acknowledged the sovereignty of God, and the reign of evil principles should have utterly passed away, could alone satisfy our aspirations. So long as sin and falsehood assert their power, we sigh for a better land. Our hopes look forward to an ideal society in heaven ; and in the New Testament we hear of an indefinite time, called ' the completion of the age ' (translated ' the end of the world ') when, the righteous shall shine as the sun in the kingdom of their Father, and the evil be exiled into their own darkness. ' The kingdom of God ' is, I think, sometimes used in a pre-eminent sense to denote this ideal society, this gathering of the saints from the four winds, when Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and all the prophets shall meet the great company of the elect. This will explain the expression which occurs a few times, '*inherit* the kingdom of God.' In his description of the last judgment Christ speaks of the righteous inheriting the kingdom prepared for them from the foundation of the world ; and this suggests the above as the natural interpretation of those passages in which it is said that certain wicked persons shall not inherit the kingdom of God ; they shall not be deemed worthy of admission to the ideal society of the blessed, and God will not acknowledge them when he gathers his own to himself. Assuredly, however, they suggest also the broader truth that the forms of wickedness which are specified are for ever inconsistent with any heartfelt acknow-

ledgment of God's reign in the soul, and that no man can attain to religious eminence who violates the fundamental precepts of morality.

The mention of inheritance conveys also this further thought. God's children may share in his beneficent rule. To inherit a kingdom is to become a king; and where God's Spirit holds dominion, it makes its royal power felt through him who is a son and heir of God. Hence the sons of the kingdom are themselves kings,¹ and by their unfeigned submission to the Lord of all become in their own persons invested with lordship. This lordly power shall not be exercised by the wicked. No unholy and profane person shall be a spiritual king. Only he who obeys the word of God shall utter it with a Divine authority, and enjoy that most regal gift, the ability to sway the hearts of his brethren for good, and direct their steps in the way of righteousness and truth.

According to the above explanation, then, the kingdom of God is not an organized society, a visible Church, but a spiritual empire, which we enter, not by change of place, but by change of heart. It is the reign of God within the soul, the dominion of righteousness and truth, that unseen realm, where in temples made without hands the spirit bows down to the Father of all, its king and its God.

We may now test our interpretation by applying it in a few instances. We have already considered

¹ So Christ says, 'I appoint unto you a kingdom, as my Father appointed to me' (*Luke* xxii. 29). Paul declares that 'They who receive the abundance of grace . . . shall reign in life' (*Rom.* v. 17). Peter calls the disciples 'a royal priesthood' (*I Peter* ii. 9). See also *Rev.* iii. 21.

its value in drawing forth the meaning of the parables ; and the following must be regarded only as examples of the mode in which other passages may be explained.

The first passage to which I would direct attention is the following : ‘ The kingdom of God cometh not with observation ; neither shall they say, lo here ! or, lo there ! for, behold, the kingdom of God is within you,’ or, as it may be translated, ‘ among you.’¹ This, it will be admitted, is one of the most marked and characteristic of Christ’s declarations, and its meaning, therefore, ought to have great weight with us. It is his emphatic answer to the question when the kingdom of God should come. Now, it is possible to interpret this passage as referring to the Christian Church. It will then mean that that Church is to grow up silently and unobserved, and that it had already begun in the midst of those who asked the question. But though this is a possible explanation, it is certainly not the one that most naturally suggests itself. The saying seems rather to be a repudiation of the notion then so prevalent, that the kingdom of God was a visible kingdom, whether a chosen people or a Church, of which you may always say ‘ lo here ! or, lo there ! ’ and an assertion that this kingdom, instead of requiring to be sought in particular places, and being discoverable by mere outward observation, was ever in the midst of men, waiting for their allegiance. Had the answer been intended to give information about the advent of the Christian Church or of a visible theocracy, it would have properly directed attention to the signs by the observation of which it

¹ *Luke xvii. 20, 21.*

might be known, and have indicated the locality where it was most likely to be found ; but instead of this Christ disclaims for the kingdom the possession of any particular locality, and intimates that men may always find it in the midst of them if they look for it with other than the eyes of sense. Such appears to me at once the simplest and profoundest interpretation of this remarkable saying.

We may next consider the statement which formed the substance of the preaching of John the Baptist, and with which Christ himself began his ministry—‘The kingdom of heaven is at hand.’ This announcement may doubtless have excited in the mind of the people the belief that the kingdom of David was about to be restored ; but as it unquestionably awakened many hopes which were doomed to disappointment, and which Christ himself evidently intended to disappoint, it is clear that his conception differed in some important respects from that which was generally current. It is quite true that the Christian Church was at hand ; but I believe that what Christ desired to impress on people’s minds was this, that the infinite majesty of God was not far away, that the time was near when it would make itself felt with a new power, and that the eternal principles of righteousness and truth were close at hand, ready to look in upon the hearts and consciences of mankind. So understood, this is a cry that ought to be perpetually raised ; for men fall into wickedness, and fail to repent, because they forget that the everlasting King is near. But why, then, say that the kingdom which is never far from any one of us has *come* near ? Simply because it seems far away when it is alien to men’s affections, and its works are not

wrought by those who ought to be its subjects. In a very solemn sense it has come near whenever a man of eminent and commanding goodness appears among us. Its law then speaks with a new impressiveness ; and while it tabernacles in the flesh, it brings its majesty before the very eyes of the negligent and scornful. And assuredly when the first-born of that kingdom lifted his voice upon the earth, the kingdom itself had come nigh, and righteousness and truth rejoiced in their approaching reign.

An incident is recorded in the Gospels to which we may refer in this connexion. A scribe on one occasion declared that 'to love God with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the soul, and with all the strength, and to love his neighbour as himself, is more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices' ; upon which Jesus observed, 'Thou art not far from the kingdom of God.'¹ Here the scribe drew a distinction between a heartfelt devotion to God and attention to outward ordinances, and so strongly did he assert the supreme value of this devotion that Christ thought he was not far from possessing it, and that another step would carry him beyond the bounds of a narrow church into the universal spiritual kingdom, where loyalty to God is the highest sentiment, and men are judged, not by their submission to ecclesiastical rule, but by the purity and fervour of their love.

A corroboration of the above view is afforded when we consider the condition which Christ lays down for admission to the kingdom. If the kingdom of God be really the reign of God in the soul,

¹ *Mark* xii. 28-34.

it is an obvious inference from this fundamental idea that its one condition of citizenship must be a surrender of our wills to the Divine, a sincere and heartfelt acknowledgment that God is our king to whom we owe an absolute obedience. It is true that our obedience may be imperfect, our conceptions rude, our knowledge of God's will incomplete. But if with earnest purpose and endeavour we maintain our loyalty, we assuredly may be reckoned among those who do the will of God, and are within the borders of his kingdom, although we may be the very least in the great company of the faithful. Accordingly we find that this is the one condition which Christ lays down for admission to the kingdom of God :—‘Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he that doeth the will of my Father who is in heaven.’¹ I know not that he lays down any other condition :—‘Whosoever shall do the will of my Father who is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother.’² If we enthrone God in our hearts, and worship him in spirit till the commandments of his love seem inscribed in living flame upon our souls, then we shall be within his kingdom, and we need not wait for any ghostly ordinance to confirm our admission; but if we disown his sovereignty, violate his law, and make our own will supreme, then, though the holiest and proudest of churches may claim us as its own, we shall be self-excluded from the kingdom of God.

In conclusion, we may return for a moment to the words, ‘Thy kingdom come.’ This prayer expresses our desire that God may rule more com-

¹ *Matthew* vii. 21.

² *Matthew* xii. 50.

pletely in our own hearts and in the hearts of our brethren. It is a prayer that his commandments may be honoured, and his truth may be known. It is a prayer that all other powers may fall down and worship him, that sin may relinquish its reign, that superstition may cease to enthrall, that mammon may no longer tie down in his golden fetters the deluded souls that were born to be free. May that kingdom come with ever mightier sway, the sway of justice and love, and establish among us that holy fellowship which befits the children and heirs of the eternal King.

CHAPTER V

DEVOTION TO GOD'S WILL A PRINCIPLE OF DUTY

THE prayer, 'Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven,' expresses the religious view of moral duty. Righteousness, to the religious mind, presents the aspect, not merely of conformity to an impersonal standard of right, but of loving submission to the Will of an all-righteous Person. Through religion the deepest and most enduring affections of our nature are enlisted on the side of goodness, and the fervour and impulse of devotion are superadded to the colder strength of conscientiousness. The language of the Christian, in addressing himself to the moral problems of life, is not so much 'What is right?' as this, 'What is thy will, O Father?' And there can be no doubt that this pious loyalty to the Father is often victorious when the unaided sense of duty would leave a man a prey to the vehemence of passion. How it is that the Divine Will and the moral law come to be coincident, whether the Will of God creates the law of righteousness or itself bows to that which even omnipotence could not alter, are questions with which philosophers may perplex themselves, but which seem to me to be above

the solution of our feeble understanding. Probably the nearest approach to a true answer that we can make is to say that the Divine Will and the law of righteousness are coeternal and alike immutable ; and it is sufficient for our religious needs that the conviction is irremovably stamped upon our hearts that the will of our Father is supremely good, and that in following its bidding we are doing that which alone is righteous and worthy of a free moral agent. Accepting this as a truth, and admitting that love to God is the reconciliation of our moral and emotional instincts, we may consider this doing of his will as a principle of duty.

The prayer that God's will may be done, if it be sincere, can imply nothing less on our part than an earnest endeavour to learn what that will is, and to conform ourselves to it so far as it is known. Undoubtedly the words of the prayer carry our thoughts far beyond ourselves, and express an aspiration for the establishment of the kingdom of heaven upon earth. They suggest too that we are to seek for goodness, not with any self-regarding aim, but simply because we love it, and desire that it should everywhere prevail. Still, aspiration was never meant to end in aspiration, but was given as a force to co-operate with our thought and will in raising us towards our ideal. Nor was the vision of a redeemed earth ever designed to withdraw our attention from homely details, but rather to give a charm and impulse to what else might be considered as the drudgery of life's duties. When we ask ourselves how we are related to our aspiration, and how far we are able to contribute to its fulfilment, we find that we are members of that great community for whose righteousness we pray,

and that therefore we must have some special part allotted to us in the vast scheme of the universe. The health and energy of the whole depend upon the excellence of the parts; and although it may not be possible for any one of us to evangelize India, or even to endow the mass of our own countrymen with the spirit of self-consecration, still a very special field has been committed to our trust, one immortal soul in which it depends to an unknown extent upon ourselves whether the Will of God be fulfilled or not. Is it not, then, the merest prayer of hypocrisy to send up to heaven the cry, 'Thy will be done,' and never to ask the question which necessarily flows from it, 'What wilt thou have *me* to do?' The disposition implied in these words is far from constituting the prevailing attitude even of good men, and it is strange with what little care we foster it. This disengagement from all personal consideration, this devout waiting for the revelation of a higher will, and humble promptitude to follow the leading of that revelation, form a distinct principle of action, and create a peculiar type of character, which, having received their purest manifestation in Christ, we may call specifically Christian.

Yet how little do Christians embrace this principle, which lies at the very root of their religion! How little do they attempt to solve life's problems under its guidance! And how much oftener is the question asked, how will this turn to my advantage, than how will it manifest the Will and Spirit of the only good? Some mistake for Christian goodness what are only its graceful appendages. Others make self-aggrandizement their rule of action, allowing only a certain restraining power to the

Divine law. And others, whose souls have not yet heard the voice of the Son of God and risen from the grave of materialism and selfishness, scoff at the Christian principle as a mystic's dream, and in comparison with wealth and comfort consider it unsubstantial as a shadow. Perhaps we may present it in a clearer light by indicating its relation to one or two other principles of action which may be confounded with it.

There are some who identify Christian goodness with the exercise of the social and benevolent affections. That these constitute a high and pure principle of action, and grace their possessor with a peculiar attractiveness, none will be disposed to deny. Christ himself lays a marked stress on this phase of character, and occasionally appears to sum up all moral duty under this one head. But, on the other hand, we must not forget that our benevolent sympathies are an original gift of our nature, and, as in the case of all our original endowments, their exercise is attended with pleasure. To gratify them just so far as the spontaneous impulse prompts, though it may indicate a certain beauty of disposition, is no more a token of virtue and of the moral bent of our will, than it is to eat and drink when we are hungry and thirsty. To be utterly deaf to the claims of pity, and to derive no pleasure from the happiness of others, shows a grievous moral deterioration, and proves that the perversity of the will has spoiled one of nature's fairest gifts.

This may enable us to understand what at first appears a contradiction in our nature, that vivid sympathies are quite compatible with a selfish life. The sympathies in themselves are not self-

regarding, but are placed in our bosom to carry us out of ourselves, and enable us to recognize a wider than mere personal good ; yet they may be gratified from pure native impulse, while the end proposed in life is a selfish one, and in every conflict between kindness and self-interest the latter gains the supremacy. It is not till they are taken up and consecrated by the will, and are consciously embraced as the true ground on which to base our entire action towards our fellow men, that they acquire any real moral significance and enter the list of Christian virtues. As soon as the fulfilment of the Divine Will becomes the aim of life, and self has with solemn purpose been laid upon the altar, our original endowments acquire a new dignity, and natural benevolence passes into Christian love. Hence it is that we sometimes detect less of Christian love in the man of refined courtesy and genial temper than in one who almost repels us by the bluntness or acerbity of his manners. The one has a ready tear for the suffering that falls under his eye, and is endeared to his companions by the quick play of his feeling ; but he never seeks the sufferer ; he never denies himself that others may be blessed ; he cares not to investigate the causes of suffering and the means by which it may be alleviated ; and when he is gone we feel that we have lost a pleasant friend, but there is no sense of bereavement in the spiritual depths of our being. The other addresses himself to the problems of our social condition, searches out the causes of suffering, devises plans for its mitigation, defends the injured, and is ever on the side of unpopular righteousness ; and we soon find ourselves acknowledging that the gruffness of manner

is superficial, but that his influence goes down into the deep, and is a moral power for good both among his friends and in society.

What makes the difference? Is it not that while the one has a richer nature, which seemed to mark him out for some honourable post in the kingdom of God, the prayer 'Thy will be done' is in his mouth an empty breath; and while the other has had many a weary conflict with an unpliant nature, that same prayer expresses his one consuming desire, to which the life is forced to bend? And must not the time come when the order of endowments will be reversed, when the secret selfishness will appear in its naked deformity, and the humble, struggling self-consecration be seen in all the beauty of its holiness?

A somewhat similar criticism may be applied to a mistake which is apt to arise in minds naturally devout. The religious sensibilities take the highest rank among our feelings, and it is not wonderful that when these are deeply stirred, we conclude that our redemption is complete. Such emotions give us an impulse towards goodness, feast the imagination with holy visions, and sweeten the toil of duty. But still they are rather the ethereal dress of beauty and gladness with which God bountifully robes religion than religion itself; at least, though they have ever been conspicuous in the Christian saint, they do not form the strength and dignity of the religion of Christ. For these, like our benevolent affections, are a natural gift, and are quite compatible with a selfish will. In many persons veneration arises in the presence of a venerable object as easily and spontaneously as compassion springs forth on the contemplation of suffering; peni-

tential sorrow is wakened by the memory of our sin ; and our devotional feelings gush forth when we think of the goodness of God.

But these, taken by themselves, reveal little in regard to character, and do not indicate the permanent direction of our preferences. Our emotions are not ends in themselves ; rather are they the motive powers which call our attention to the various objects adapted to our nature, and impart an impulse towards their attainment. But it is the energy and perseverance with which the will embraces the noblest objects that constitute a high character. If we allow the soul to be the passive theatre of emotion, though we may sometimes be conscious of a ' wild seraphic fire,' we shall never possess the pure, calm strength of religion ; and when in its turn the flood of unholy passion comes, and it is sure to come, it will sweep us away feeble and unresisting victims. The religious feelings tell us that the Divine Will is best ; but they do not compel us to choose it as our only guide. While that will is sweet, and never crosses our pride or interferes with our pleasures, how delightful to flatter ourselves that we are on the side of God, and to bow our heads in an adoration that costs us nothing ; but how hard, when that will is not our will, to recognize it as supremely good ; how hard, when the dews of agony are on the brow, to choose it with an energy of purpose which the world in arms could not daunt. The languishing fondness of many a voluptuous saint will start away offended at the first mention of a cross ; and many others who know only that their love is cold, and that devotion droops with tired wing, are yet prepared to receive with meek content whatever God appoints

and to do with unflinching purpose whatever he commands. In the former case nature may have been originally more attractive, and capable of more varied development; but the will is still self-centred, and the prayer 'Thy will be done' is uttered with no depth of meaning. In the other case the soul has learned its own poverty, and has chosen God as its one end, its wealth, its joy, its life, and with all the meaning that an intense purpose can impart breathes its aspiration,

One prayer I have—all prayers in one—
When I am wholly thine :
Thy will, my God, thy will be done,
And let that will be mine.

Lastly, let us guard against an error which may arise from the stress which Christianity lays on the obligation of self-denial. We must not suppose that the pain attendant on a course of action is any test of its righteousness, or that the true spirit of self-denial may not be found amid pursuits congenial to the natural tastes. To romantic temperaments there may be something attractive even in self-inflicted pain; and to renounce the world or to repudiate any particular class of pleasures by some formal act has a certain charm for the untutored imagination, and seductively flatters our self-love. But self-renunciation of this kind has in itself no moral significance. That depends on the purpose for which the self-denial is incurred; and there is often a more genuine self-surrender to God in the modest discharge of a homely round of duties than in the dazzling sacrifices which gain the admiration of the world. Perhaps, however, the other form of error is more common, which

supposes that in the sphere of our ordinary pursuits, which involve little pain and clearly tend to promote our happiness, there is little room for religion. But although our occupations afford us real pleasure, we may nevertheless engage in them devoutly as appointed for us by the providence of God. Religious writers are too much in the habit of dwelling upon pain and sorrow as the appointment of God, and speaking of his Will as something to be borne, as though its chief aspect were one of hardship and terror. It is true that we all have painful duties to perform, and that we must prove our loyalty by courage and endurance ; but we must remember that for one duty that wrings the heart God assigns us a thousand that are bright with joy, and we must not allow these to be robbed of their blessedness by forgetting that God is present in gladness as in sorrow, in prosperous business and happy home as truly as in adversity and bereavement. What we need is to ask earnestly and impartially what is the Divine Will, and then whether it place upon our heads a crown of gold or a crown of thorns, to receive either with the same gentle submission, neither exalted by the one nor dismayed by the other.

This spirit may be carried through the whole course of life, and is as appropriate in the warehouse as in the church, in the palace of ease as in the hovel of penury. To go wherever our Father leads, grateful for the pleasures, patient under the sorrows of the way ; to recognize the dignity of our life's work if only it be from him ; to accept the dangers of eminence, or seek the safe retreat of obscurity, as he may direct ; simple devotion to his Will, uninfluenced by personal consequences,

whether painful or the reverse—this is the Christian ideal, for the attainment of which we so often pray. And is this indeed our heart's prayer, the prayer which expressed the all-absorbing desire of Christ, whose soul we seek to understand, whose aspirations we desire to share? May we no longer be divided between self and God, but choose him with the whole energy of our being, and in the holiest spirit of self-consecration breathe the words, 'Thy will be done in earth as it is in heaven.'

CHAPTER VI

GOD'S WILL IN RELATION TO WORLDLY BUSINESS

WE have seen that devotion to God's will constitutes a principle of duty. The words of the Lord's Prayer suggest the possibility of bringing down to earth the great law of life which prevails among the highest spirits. A principle of duty must be capable of a deliberate and rational application to the real business of life. We must not confine ourselves to a vague generality of statement, or suppose that an occasional movement of piety will give a religious bearing to our conduct or a religious significance to our lives ; but it is necessary to examine how far a devout regard for the Divine Will may affect the direction of our affairs, and how it may assist us in the solution of those difficult problems which so often in practical life perplex the conscientious, and alienate good men from one another. By way of supplementing and giving a more practical application to the remarks in the last chapter I would offer a few hints upon this interesting, but somewhat difficult subject.

The question which we are to consider may be

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thus stated: Can a regard for the Divine Will affect our choice of an occupation in life, and the spirit in which we are to engage in it, or is that step which is so largely to colour our thoughts and characters, and to influence our future welfare and usefulness, to be determined by considerations lying wholly outside the domain of religion? Is it to be supposed that God has any will in relation to the various pursuits of men and the work which they undertake to accomplish, or does he confine himself to the enactment of certain regulative laws, within which men may act as they please, without reference to him?

In attempting to answer this question, I would begin with the remark that the distinction which has been so long sanctioned between the world and the Church is misleading, and inconsistent with the highest conceptions and the purest practice of Christianity. A habit has grown up among Christians of speaking as though the Church were the peculiar sphere of God's presence and operation; as though all its institutes were Divine, while those of the world are secular or profane; as though the place of worship were in some mysterious and unusual sense the dwelling-place of God, and the Sunday were 'the day' which he 'hath made,' and whose 'hours' he calls peculiarly 'his own.' This habit, largely borrowed from the Old Testament conceptions, has grown up in spite of the emphatic protest of the Christian Scriptures, and has become so inveterate that it affects to some extent the phraseology even of those with whose more spiritual faith it is inconsistent.

Let not this be misunderstood. I would not deny the inestimable advantage of organizations

for specially religious work ; of buildings consecrated by the speciality of their use to the highest order of sentiment and thought, and by the power of association rendering men more distinctly conscious of the claims of religion, and more awake to the reality of the Divine presence ; or of days solemnly set apart for the special recognition of the moral side of our being, and for meeting one another, not in the intercourse of business or the enjoyment of a merely social friendship, but in testimony of common religious needs and aspirations, and as an evidence of spiritual fraternity ; or even of a distinct order of men whose characteristic duty it shall be to prosecute the investigation of religious truth, to lead the public worship of their brethren, to apply the great laws of justice and brotherly love to the ordinary life of men, and to plead for religion and goodness with a more formal advocacy than most men are able to employ.

But I do most earnestly protest against the custom of setting these over against the other institutions and other pursuits which are necessary in human society, as though they belonged exclusively to the Divine realm, and all else lay without in a cold, godless wilderness. They are adapted to the limitations of our capacities, and suited to the wants of our nature ; but they are not representative of any corresponding reality in God ; and when we think of the Church as his special dwelling-place, or of the Sunday as possessing a sanctity which does not rightfully belong to all days, we are but thrusting upon him our own weakness and partiality, and forgetting the great Christian doctrine of his spirituality and omnipresence. When we admit, or claim, that the ordinances of religion

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are divinely instituted, we must not forget that there are various other offices which are as essential to our well-being, and as distinctly grounded in our present nature, and that they too are from God, and, if we have but faith to see it, are illumined with a glory from his presence. Our nature is rich and complex, and the wonderful powers which God has bestowed upon it could never be developed by our indulging in only one order of emotion, or pursuing only one kind of occupation, however exalted these might be. Our religion itself would become morbid, and not improbably end in insanity, if we attempted to confine our attention exclusively to the cultivation of our highest faculty, and forgot the imperative, and, as I think, Divine claims of lower, but not therefore less essential, parts of our being; and that world

Where congregations ne'er break up,
And sabbaths never end,

if such a world exist, must be not only a less varied and less interesting, but a less Divine world than that in which our all-wise and merciful Father has seen good to place us. That is a higher and truer view which regards the whole of society as one complicated organism, divinely instituted for the development and happiness of human beings, and for the worthy exercise of all their marvellous endowments. It is not through any caprice of selfishness, or through any conscious calculation of the benefits to be derived from union, but in obedience to a powerful instinct implanted within the heart by our Creator, that we are drawn together into communities, and consent to act as members of a body politic. Those, accordingly, who believe

that our instinctive desires are not the offspring of depravity, but have been placed in our breasts to act in subservience to some high purpose, will readily admit that society is of Divine appointment, and that the existence of communities which bring man into the most varied relations with his fellow man is in accordance with the Supreme Will.

We may, then, look forth upon society, or the world, as it is called, with the same kind of reverence as we bestow upon a Church. It too is an organism whose origin and law are in God ; and in spite of its corruption (I know not that it is more corrupt than many churches), its ideal is pure, beautiful, Divine. It may be that in this great temple religion and the Church occupy the holy of holies ; but the whole of society, of which the Church represents but a single function, claims the presence of Him in whom men live and move, and owns as its title to existence the ordinance of Him without whose sustaining love darkness and chaos would resume their reign.

If we accept the general proposition that civil society is not to be presented in sharp contrast with ecclesiastical, and distinguished from it by such depreciatory epithets as worldly, secular, and profane, but on the contrary is to be regarded as a more comprehensive, or at the very least as a co-ordinate, Divine institution, then it will follow that whatever is essential to the highest welfare and efficiency of the whole, or whatever flows necessarily out of the very constitution of society, is also of Divine appointment. Hence we learn that God has created the day of toil as well as the day of rest, and that the strong and active hand is his gift as truly as the aspiration of prayer. We

learn that when we depart from our place of worship we do not cease to stand on holy ground, and, when the last words of the benediction have died upon our ears, we still hear in our souls the undying word of the Most High. We learn to find ministers of God all around us, to hear his voice in the innocent mirth of childhood, and in the grave discussions of the thoughtful, and to perceive that the statesman, the judge, the merchant, the physician, are, as truly as the clergy, in 'holy orders,' each contributing his proper gift to the maintenance of a divinely appointed system.

Taking such a survey of society, and noticing that each man does, consciously or unconsciously, contribute his proper gift to the preservation or the progress of the community, we have our attention called to a very beautiful and beneficent law, which, to my mind, presents no doubtful trace of a providential hand. We see that men are conducted to the immense variety of occupation required by the exigencies of our social life, by a corresponding variety in their tastes and opportunities, so that, as a general rule, they enter without contrivance and without resistance, and fill with pleasure and profit to themselves those posts in which they render most important service to their fellow men. Often indeed our clumsy artificial arrangements, oftener our selfishness and sin, interfere with the free action of this law; but it is sufficiently general in its operation to enable us to believe that the necessary occupations of civil life are of Divine appointment, that God does actually intend men to discharge very diverse duties, and that he assigns to them for this purpose appropriate gifts, 'dividing to every man severally

as he will.' He fashions 'one vessel for honour, another for dishonour'; one man to fill a distinguished office, and by the splendour of his talents to exercise a wide and ennobling influence, another to plod with dull monotony at a task which requires little wit and attracts but little admiration; one by his far seeing counsels to guide the State through its hour of peril, another to trudge after the oxen or the plough; one with acute observation and diligent search to detect the laws on which physical energy depends, another with brush and shovel to assist in the practical observance of those laws.

But all these in their various departments of labour are following the Divine hand. The different spheres of duty allotted to human life are traced by him whom we worship in the sanctuary, and whose loving wisdom invites us to reserve one day in seven to rest from the cares of business, and to cherish those higher thoughts and feelings without which society must lapse into anarchy. And our Sabbaths will not have been spent in vain if we catch a fresh glimpse of the holiness of life, learn to trace the presence of God in every position of honourable service, and recognize in the ascending scale of social offices and duties a sacred hierarchy appointed and consecrated by our Father in heaven.

If the above be the correct view of society, it is not difficult to see how the prayer that God's will may be done will affect our relation to our special pursuits in life. I believe that in regard to the distribution of men's work the will of God is already to a great extent accomplished, and that the most pious and earnest determination to be guided

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solely by the intimations of that Will would not very extensively alter the present arrangements ; for, as we have seen, there is a law by which, without their own conscious purpose, men are led into their employments under the direction of a higher Power. The same considerations of taste and aptitude and circumstance which determine our choice now would, in a more religious community, be accepted as tokens of the Divine intention. Religion would not necessarily introduce any new element by which to guide the judgment, but it would consecrate the reasons which already exist, and accept as revelations of a Father's will what to the worldly mind are merely the steps of a prudent calculation. This remark will certainly require some limitation, as, unfortunately, there are offices undertaken in society which are utterly illegitimate, and human sin is perpetually tending to disarrange the Divine order of our social economy. Still, these marked blots on our civilization are not its characteristics ; and, bearing in mind this exception, we may admit that the distribution of human engagements would be substantially the same if men consulted the oracles of conscience far more earnestly and devoutly than they at present consider necessary.

How, then, would this recognition of the sanctity of our social relations, and loving self-consecration to whatever employment we undertake, affect our life's work ?

In the first place it would materially affect the object which we propose to ourselves in life, and the spirit with which we enter upon our work. There are two very different questions with which we may start in life :—how shall I secure the

largest advantage for myself? and how shall I best fulfil the purpose for which I was sent into the world? As we have admitted, the answers to the two questions may be in most cases coincident, so far as regards our choice of an occupation. But does it make no difference whether we assume an engagement in order to extract the most cash from it, or in order to put the most soul into it; whether we grasp it selfishly as a means of worldly advancement, or accept it reverently as the task allotted to us by a higher Will? We justly pass a severe sentence upon him who enters the ministry of Christ's gospel merely as a convenient profession, and with no sense of the solemn and responsible trust which he undertakes; and we deem him unfitted for the work simply because he begins it with a wrong motive, views it in a false light, and dares to pervert to his own selfish purposes a sphere of duty where God's will, and not man's, is to be done. But the same severity of judgment ought to be applied to every calling; for there is not one where a clear sense of duty, and an earnest desire to glorify God, would be misplaced. How much grander and more ennobling would our work become, and with how much more dignity and power should we commence it, did we accept it as a holy trust from God, and, acknowledging him to be the supreme and all-wise director of our destiny, consciously place ourselves under his control, that we might be 'labourers together with him.'

Then, if riches poured into our laps, we would endeavour to use them worthily, as lent us for a sacred purpose; and if not, we would wrap ourselves in the mantle of duty, and try to manifest in our poverty the riches of a loyal and filial soul.

But if we look upon the world as profane, the lawful theatre of our selfishness and greed, we shall change it from a field of Divine discipline into a desert of temptation. We shall enter upon our work with no inspiring motives, and no manly sense of responsibility; and for us, by whatever name it may be called, it will be a mean work, because undertaken in a mean and grovelling spirit. Should it bring wealth, our wealth will but make more conspicuous the vulgarity of our minds; and should it entail poverty, the darkness of that poverty will be unrelieved by any ray of noble thought or meek submission. To God, then, let our life's work be consecrated, and let us choose it, not that we may be comfortable, or rich, or admired, but that his Will may be done on earth as it is in heaven.

It is hardly necessary to indicate how greatly a clear faith in the Divine presence in society would affect the spirit in which our work is carried on. Let the fulfilment of God's will be our paramount desire in the discharge of our social duty, and then the highest moral law will be inflexibly maintained. Justice, honour, kindness, will not then, as too often now, be jostled and thrust aside in the mad race for money. You may gain riches without too nice a regard for the strict limits of integrity, or too rigid a scrutiny into the moral results of your practices; but you can never do the Will of God by insulting his law, or glorify his name by the least departure from the rules of the highest and most delicate honour. You can no more, as a man of business, fulfil your divinely appointed function by the slightest laxity of principle than the minister of religion can fulfil his by hypocrisy and formalism;

and as soon as men, in their daily attention to business, whatever it may be, make it their supreme desire that God's will may be done, and that they may complete, as his faithful children, the task which he has entrusted to their care, the various duties of life will be discharged with an intelligence, an earnestness, a fidelity, and a purity of sentiment which will ensure to society the accomplishment of some great end, and secure the highest and most enduring interests of all its members.

Thus the prayer that God's will may be done on earth as it is in heaven is no aspiration for some imaginary kingdom, where the Church swallows up all other institutions ; but it sheds a light over the whole texture of our social existence, and in proportion to the sincerity with which it is uttered in the Church is the power with which it makes itself manifest in the world.

CHAPTER VII

DEVOTION TO GOD'S WILL IN RELATION TO THE DISCOVERY OF TRUTH

OUT of the great variety of subjects to which the doing of God's will might be applied we may now select one, and consider the bearing of this principle upon the solution of those problems which in all ages have excited the fiercest controversy, and divided good men into hostile ranks. Can our prayer that God's will may be done affect our judgment upon such matters as the course of political events and measures, the names and organizations of religious sects, or even upon those metaphysical questions which more than all others have exasperated men's hatred, and ranged them in mutually intolerant parties? If it can influence our decision in regard to such inquiries, it is well that we should endeavour to learn the manner and limits of its application. The following remarks must be accepted simply as suggestions towards the more perfect treatment of a great subject.

In opening our inquiry we may conveniently draw a distinction between speculative and practical questions, including under the first head those which we try to determine simply for their own sake, and in which the practical consequences are

a matter of secondary and subsequent consideration, and under the second head those in which our leading aim is to decide upon a course of conduct, and we descend to first principles only for the sake of the practical result. Religious and political questions are the most prominent representatives of these two classes, and those in which men have always shown an absorbing and passionate interest. How does our submission to the Divine Will affect our judgment upon such topics?

Under the head of speculative questions we may confine our attention to the problems of religion, as being those which have received the most general attention, and lie nearest to every man's thought.

The position has often been maintained, sometimes probably as the mere result of passion and prejudice, but sometimes with deliberate conviction, that a surrendered will is a sure guide to the possession of religious truth. Thus generally stated, this is a position which has commanded the assent of some of the profoundest minds, and appears to have received no doubtful sanction from Christ himself—'If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine.' Indeed it seems to be a characteristic doctrine of the New Testament that our tenure of religious knowledge is dependent, not so much on the acuteness of the speculative intellect, as on the purity and singleness of the heart. Our devout instincts also lead us in the same direction, and we cannot but trust that, if we humbly commit ourselves to the leading of the higher will, God will send out his light and his truth, and guide us to all needful wisdom.

The indiscreet application, however, of this principle is the parent of intolerance. Its clear

converse is this, that all error has its root in sin, and that therefore the obliquity of a man's creed is a sure evidence of the depravity of his heart. Even this position might be occupied without dangerous consequences by men graced with that rarest of virtues, sincere humility. They would argue thus—Our hearts, in spite of our earnest endeavours, are more or less turned away from the Divine ideal; and therefore, notwithstanding our patient thought and imploring supplications, there must be some aberration in our belief, and there may be as much as in that of our neighbour who holds such widely different views. But unfortunately the following reasoning is more frequently, though perhaps unconsciously, adopted—We have sought for religious truth with the most perfect purity of intention and with the deepest desire to be guided only by the eternal Light, and therefore we know that what we hold is true, and is a touchstone whereby to prove the hearts of men; and all who maintain a different doctrine must have followed the father of lies, and in proportion to the apparent nobleness of their character is the peril of their opinions and the necessity of removing them as obstructors of truth and the enemies of God. When this reasoning is fortified by a general consent of religious persons, the patient and original inquirer, who is nearly singular in his opinions, is hunted down as an emissary of Satan, his good deeds are ascribed to hypocrisy or the absence of temptation, and the strangeness of his belief is accepted as an unquestionable proof of his deep-seated corruption. Thus piety is induced to range itself on the side of bigotry, and to shelter with its sacred mantle that impatience of con-

flicting opinions which arises from our disturbed vanity, and that desire to silence an opponent which springs from the love of power when unbalanced by humility and justice.

The serious consequences to individual freedom and to the progress of truth resulting from such a mode of argument have induced many to take up the opposite position. It is contended that our acceptance of any opinion is entirely dependent on its logical evidence. Goodness and truth, it is said, belong to two unrelated spheres, and you can never legitimately argue from one to the other. You may have the most absolute submission to the Divine Will, and yet be an indifferent theologian ; and to think lightly of a man on account of his religious views is as unjust as it is ungenerous. ' We shall be judged, not by our opinions, but by our fidelity,' has almost become a maxim among many, and has driven theology into such a subordinate position that one sometimes fears that it may chill the ardour of our aspiration after truth, and blunt the keenness of our search.

It may be questioned, however, whether this position is tenable in its extreme form, and whether it does not lead as surely as the other to unfair judgments. Is there really no relation between the inner deep of our lives and our religious views ? Will the warm and affectionate nature adopt the same opinions as the cold and unimaginative ? Will the devout and mystical temperament be convinced by the same evidence as the hard and practical ? Will the soul that shrinks from its own weakness, and repeats with transport, ' I know that my Redeemer liveth,' rest peacefully in the same results as the untempted and self-reliant ? Would

the theology of Pelagius sit gracefully upon Augustine, or that of Dr. Pusey on Theodore Parker ? If the brothers Newman had changed places, would there have been no violence to their innermost convictions, no withdrawal of needed supplies from their religious thirst ? Surely there is a unity in man, and the visible fabric of his speculative opinions is reared on the invisible foundations of the spirit. And if this be so, is there no injustice in sneering at men as prejudiced, ignorant, servile, or dishonest, because they will not acknowledge themselves convinced by evidence which appears satisfactory to us ? Is it not conceivable that the evidence is so conclusive for us on account of some narrowness in our nature, and that it is through some defect of vision that we believe we have seen to the bottom of the subject, when in reality our eyes have but skimmed the surface ? Would it not be wiser as well as more modest to admit that nature, imperfectly constituted, catches only imperfect glimpses of the truth, and that only he who has received the fullness of the Spirit can look upon the full-orbed light ?

These opposing considerations may perhaps induce us to accept the following as the true position for us to maintain. We ought not, except in the most guarded manner, to judge anyone by his religious views. This appears to be the only just and safe ground for us to assume, not because a meagre theology is not expressive of a meagre soul, not because there is no connexion between the spirit of a man's life and his religious opinions, but because the connexion is of the very subtlest kind, and the smallest departure from completeness or equilibrium in the inner forces of the soul may re-

appear enormously magnified at the end of a chain of argument. It must also be admitted that in the expression of our religious opinions a considerable part, though not the whole, of the process is simply intellectual, and that therefore a man with a rich and pure spirit may, through poverty of intellect, fail to do justice to his innermost convictions. And lastly, we have a far readier and surer criterion by which to form our judgments. A man's actions, understanding by that word the whole tenor of the outward life, are incomparably the most trustworthy expression of his moral and spiritual energies ; and it is quite unwarrantable to set aside the verdict sanctioned by a life of purity and beneficence on the authority of a test which only the most delicate knowledge of the human mind and the deepest and tenderest sympathy with its most secret workings could apply with any approach to accuracy in the result. On these grounds I think it will be admitted that we ought never to condemn another, or think slightly of his character, on account of his theological position.

But we need not therefore admit that our own humble submission to the Divine Will has no relation to the discovery of religious truth, nor need we relax the earnestness of our prayers for the clear and colourless light of heaven. I do not indeed see any ground for supposing that a miraculous illumination is given in answer to our petitions, or that the thought which flashes into the mind even in the moment of intensest communion is of necessity divinely true. Even in that most solemn hour we must try the spirits whether they be of God, and prove the soundness of our thoughts by the laws of evidence which God has appointed for each class

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of inquiry. But still in escaping, as it were, from our own centre, and adoring that higher will which never errs, we are aided in the discovery of truth by a process whose laws can be determined, and which we may endeavour faithfully to apply in conducting our investigations.

We are, in the first place, relieved from those obstructions which block up the avenues to religious truth. These obstructions are our passions and prejudices. In our self-will we love and cling to an opinion simply because it is our own ; and we dread the mortification of confessing ourselves mistaken ; we fear the reproaches of our party ; we long to gain a triumph over an opponent, and to evince the superior quality of our talent and learning.

We are also attached, not unreasonably, to opinions which we have long held ; we have formed our habits and constructed our whole scheme of thought in reliance upon them ; and we shrink from the labour, difficulty, and hazard of admitting a new truth or rejecting an old error, and consequently readjusting the entire field of our thought. But let the Will of God reign supreme in our hearts, and these things no longer move us. Then we love and adore truth for her own sake, and we are prepared to follow her though for a time she may seem to blast our fairest hopes, and lead us through a wilderness of doubt and despair. Mortification of our pride and vanity, a sense of inner darkness and need of other light than our own, a severance of ancient ties and the bleeding heart of solitude may all be needful for us, if we are ever to view the stainless robe and clasp the feet of that fairest daughter of God, eternal Truth.

Again, submission to the Will of God enables us to estimate more justly the value of evidence, and thereby increases our power of arriving at correct opinions. There is in many controversialists a deplorable incapacity for appreciating or justly treating the position of their opponents ; and though this may in many instances be due to a natural defect, I fear that it is to a large extent wilful. I do not mean that many are base enough to say distinctly to themselves, I will misinterpret the views of my adversary, and escape from his arguments by sliding off upon a false issue ; but I do fear that wonderfully few address themselves seriously, humbly, and prayerfully to the thorough apprehension of an antagonistic position. Without such apprehension we cannot be masters of our subject, and without an earnest endeavour to sympathize with views opposed to our own we are guilty of wrapping ourselves in deluding fogs of our own creation. But let the Will of God be acknowledged in lowly prayer at the beginning of our investigation, and then justice with impartial scales will preside over our inquiry, and enable us to determine with accuracy on which side lies the preponderating evidence.

There is one other thought which must not be omitted, though it is difficult to express. Devotion to the Will of God gives a higher order of experiences and a rarer sensitiveness to the soul, whereby it is more amply furnished with data for the discovery of religious truth. In that calm and holy realm which we enter when our own wills are lost in adoration of the Divine, we look into new depths in the Spirit, and that life, of which so much of our theology is but the formulated expression, comes

in fuller, grander flood, and bears us up upon its flowing tide nearer to the catholicity of truth. And if for all but the sainted children of God this flood must ebb as well as flow, yet it leaves upon the margin of the intellectual shore richer materials of thought, and sympathies which ramify into more varied channels of mental tendency and spiritual desire.

Who cannot see that with a nature thus more munificently endowed, and with a new solemnity and earnestness gathered round it, we are nearer the truth than when, with narrow sympathies and meagre experience, we knew nothing of communion with God, and that, even if we fail to pluck the fruit of that knowledge which shall not pass away, we shall not fail to reap the more precious harvest of wisdom, and to retain the spirit, if we miss the form, of truth? Thus, in sinking out of ourselves that God may lift us up, in becoming nothing that we may be the organs of his Will, we place ourselves in a more secure attitude for solving the problems of religion; and though no sudden, miraculous light is given to our prayers, yet in the more tedious methods which his wisdom approves our Father will guide the steps of those who seek his face, and aid their devout endeavours to frame a theology not wholly unworthy of the grandeur of its themes.

Comparatively little remains to be said under our second division. In politics not less than in religion the great obstacles to real progress are prejudice and selfish or party passion. In discussions where varying decisions will necessitate different courses of action, men's animosity is easily kindled, and they seldom appreciate at their true value one

another's motives and arguments. If the truth is to be seen, and the Divine plan followed, it is essential that the hot and lurid air of antipathy and self-will should be cleared and cooled by the refreshing breath of religious consecration.

Again, the correct determination of most practical questions is dependent, not merely upon abstract principle, but also upon considerations of expediency and the evidence of facts. The cautious and candid estimate of all considerations bearing on the subject, and the patient, thorough, and accurate collection of facts, involve moral qualities of no mean order. Numbers of alleged facts are being constantly circulated through society and influencing people's judgments, which, when traced to head-quarters, are discovered to be without foundation, or to have originated in some unaccountable misconception. Even the bare statement of a fact requires great delicacy both of conscience and of sympathy ; for without scrupulous care it is sure to be coloured by the object which we have in view, and without a deep knowledge of human nature we cannot judge accurately of the impression which our words are likely to produce on others ; and thus, with the best intentions, men sometimes make statements which appear true to themselves, but convey to others by implication an erroneous idea.

These suggestions may be sufficient to show us that in the sphere of practical questions our devotion to God's will ought to have no mean share in determining the conclusions in which we rest. That devotion raises us above the strife of party, and communicates generosity and nobleness to our aims. It gives to our investigation that thorough-

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ness, to our argument that honour, to our views that breadth, which are essential to him who would follow in this world the truest and wisest course. And thus the light of heaven breaks in upon our perplexity, and makes clear our tangled way, when the Will of the only Good takes captive our will, and moulds it into its own purity and love.

CHAPTER VIII

OUR DAILY BREAD

AN objection is felt by many persons to all prayers for physical blessings, and is sometimes urged with a clearness and force which, in spite of the protest of the devout emotions, it is not easy to resist. Outward nature, it is said, is the realm of fixed law. All its changes take place in a predetermined course. Here the will of God is immutable, dependent on no conditions extraneous to himself, and incapable of modification to meet the desires of any of his creatures. Science has been slowly gathering the whole universe under the dominion of law, and has so steadily reclaimed one field after another from the reign of chance or caprice that no doubt can be left upon the mind, that even where the existence of law has not yet been ascertained, nature nevertheless works by discoverable methods, and the storm, the shower, or the flood comes with the same certainty as an eclipse, dependent only on more complicated, not on less unchangeable, conditions. How absurd, then, to carry into the domain of nature our weak and foolish petitions; for, though supplicating millions should gird the earth, nature would move calmly on her beneficent or destructive course,

heedless of throbbing hearts and passionate entreaties. Prayer never stills the remorseless waves, nor averts the murderous explosion, nor eradicates the fever poison from the blood. It is a power which never crosses the border line that separates the spiritual from the natural world, and the only rational course is to confine it to the former, where the dominion of immutable law is not known to prevail, and where, if it be yet discovered, prayer is at least one of the recognized forces.

Our devout emotions, however, protest against this conclusion, so inevitable in the eye of reason. We cannot, indeed, by order, do anything more than *read* prayers, a very different thing from praying, for the advent of rain or the removal of a plague; but still, when our emotion reaches a certain height, it breaks spontaneously into prayer. When the plague enters our own household, and threatens to leave our hearth desolate, we pray. When the pilgrim, fainting with thirst in the desert, feels that he can drag himself but a little further, he prays. When the poor hear their little ones crying with hunger, and know not where to turn for the next meal, they pray for daily bread with an earnestness and pathos which most of us have never known. Now, are we to treat all this as superstition, to be reined in with the severe bridle of reason, or can we find any justifying plea which will permit us still to breathe our desires in the ears of infinite Love?

One plea that may be advanced is the following. A large portion of the material world is by no means so independent of human character as the argument supposes. We may interfere in a variety of ways with the regular course of nature, and no

one can maintain that the face of the world presents the same appearance as it would do if uninhabited by a moral and intelligent race. The discovery of law is in many instances the discovery, not of our helplessness, but of the means by which we may subject nature to our control. A knowledge of the properties of the magnet renders us more fearless on the sea. The clearing away of extensive forests, or the draining of swamps, may produce important changes of climate. The labours of the husbandman convert the wilderness into a garden, and even the lightning may be turned from its desolating course, and conducted peacefully to the ground. And if we come to the supply of daily bread, it certainly does not drop upon our tables by any unchangeable law, but is dependent on an almost incalculable variety of human motive and activity, and a moral derangement in our social organism might at any time imperil our present abundance. These facts prove that, if prayer brings down any blessing on the human soul, if it keeps alive its higher aspirations, and gives impulse and energy to the whole of the mental life, then it does affect indirectly the course of nature, and modify the material conditions in which we live.

It may indeed be impossible to trace in special cases the effect of prayer, and it is quite certain that no entreaty for bread will by an immediate process replenish our tables ; but it may remove a cloud of despondency which darkened the judgment or damped the resolution, and enable a man to make one more effort, which will at last be crowned with success ; or it may force upon the thoughts, in sterner answer, the ungrateful extravagance or sensual indulgence which has caused

the present penury, and so lead to repentance, the source at once of a holier mind and a brighter lot ; or yet again, it may induce a spirit of trustful and patient content, which in its turn may touch some benevolent heart, and open the hand of charity. In such ways, without the introduction of miracle, the prayer for outward blessings may be answered ; and I see no reason to doubt that a nation which habitually looks in prayer to God for the supply of its wants will have more abundance, and be more blessed in its abundance, than one which forgets its dependence upon Him, and, presuming on his unchanging goodness, never deigns to ask for those things which it regards as the inalienable prizes of human energy, and which it pursues with all the waywardness and vehemence of selfish passion.

This subject may also be considered from another point of view. The objection to prayer for physical blessings rests upon the assumption that its utility is the only justification for prayer, and that it is essentially absurd to pray unless we are likely to secure thereby the objects of our desire. I know that this objection may be urged with the highest feelings of reverence ; but still it does seem to me that when we begin to question the utility of our prayers, the spirit of prayer is already leaving us, and we are departing from the filial attitude. Prayer, which breaks so spontaneously from the full heart, has surely a significance of its own, and its value is not to be tested simply by its power of production. It is at least as much the consecration of our desires as a claim for their gratification. It is the spiritual energy which gathers up all our wishes, and disposes them in order before the Divine Will, for Him to choose or to reject.

In the devout mind every worthy desire is immediately converted into prayer; and every desire which is not fit for the ear of God is exorcized by submission and penitence. To allow the soul to retain a whole class of desires which it may never bring into its communion with God would be to impose on it an unnatural restriction. Either a desire may piously breathe itself in the ear of infinite Love, or it ought not to be harboured within our breast. If it be unwarrantable to pray for that which is determined by the absolute and immutable Will of God, it is no less weak and foolish to desire it, and man ought to become a statue, cold and without emotion. Accordingly we find that, when beneficent nature is allowed to have her own way, desire and prayer are governed by the same rule in their relation to natural laws. Where the law is known and uncontrollable, there is room for neither. Hope is the element in which they arise; and they are excluded by certainty. In regard, for instance, to the rising and setting of the sun, or the course of the earth upon its orbit, our wishes are superseded by pleasure, sorrow, or indifference. The same is the case even when the feelings are intensely interested. We neither desire nor pray that the grave will restore to our embrace the friend for whom we weep, because we know that it will not. There the Will of God is pronounced, and we can but acquiesce.

But a very different result is observable when the law, though believed to exist, is not known. No certainty of conviction that meteorology has fixed laws prevents our hoping and wishing for fair weather; and no knowledge that the course of disease is dependent on physical conditions

prevents our desiring and praying for the recovery of our friend. In such instances our desire may be proved by the result to have been in opposition to the Divine Will; and it might be maintained that we ought never to send our longing forward into the uncertain future, lest we should be guilty of attempting to alter the unchangeable laws of our being. But we could not, if we would, thus repress the instinctive cravings of nature, and freeze human life into a placid acquiescence in what is present. The imagination will glow, and the eye essay a prophetic glance, and the heart beat with hopes destined perhaps never to be realized. Yet the thought that our fondest hopes may be dashed, our desires set at naught, and our prayers be impotent to affect the conditions of our life, is not without its influence. If it does not extinguish, it purifies the flame of our earthly wishes. It takes from them their animal passionateness, and clothes them with moderation and submissiveness. The faith that we are in the hands of a higher Power who follows only the counsels of his own wisdom, and that our vain ambition can never alter the purposes of infinite Love, gives a holy calmness to the mind, and prepares it to accept with thankfulness either the fruition or the disappointment of its hopes. Prayers for outward things are similarly affected. Our prayer ceases to be a mere utilitarian expedient, and becomes the submissive expression of a desire in the presence of Him who gives or withholds according to his own high purpose, but who assuredly withholds more gently from the child who seeks in him the fulfilment of every longing.

The essence of all true prayer is surrender to

the Divine Will ; ' If it be possible, may it be so ; but if not, thy will be done.' Nothing can appear to me more disastrous than a divorce between our desires and our prayers, uttering in prayer the language of desires we do not feel, and cherishing in active life desires for whose gratification we dare not pray. Rather let every foolish wish as it arises be converted into prayer, and instead of becoming a mad and dominant passion it will disappear, like the fancies of childhood, in the light of a higher wisdom. Desire, in passing into prayer, becomes glorified. If it attain its object, it uses it unselfishly and reverently ; if its object be denied, it wins a nobler blessing, the power of dispensing with it and yet esteeming itself rich. These considerations may enable us to see that the value and significance of prayer are not to be estimated by its measurable results. It is to be prized and cherished for what it is rather than for what it brings ; and we need not shrink from seeking our Father's sympathy in our wants, and asking from his full hand the supply of our necessities, because our logic can discover in this process no utility, and can prove that the sun rises with careless impartiality on the evil and the good. Rather ought we to avoid prayer as a malignant power, were it possessed of that very utility which, it is said, could alone justify it. If it really enabled us to obtain whatever we desired, if it turned nature from her appointed course in obedience to our caprice, and brought down the Divine Wisdom to the standard of human folly, we might well shrink appalled from the exercise of so awful a gift. But now we venture to proffer our petitions precisely because we know that they

will not be granted in deference to our short-sighted judgment, but that God will answer them in whatever way his wisdom and goodness may deem to be the best.

The considerations here advanced may all be urged on behalf of prayer for daily bread. The supply of our necessities is one of those things which are not determined solely by the inflexible procedure of physical law, but in part by the variable forces of man's intellectual and moral life. In praying for bread we are but owning our ultimate dependence upon Him who gives its fruitfulness to the ground, and turns the hearts of men to himself, and directs their energies into the channels of friendly intercourse and mutual advantage. In offering this prayer, too, we need have no apprehension that we are running counter to the Divine Will ; for our Father knows that we have need of daily bread, and for the most part it is his pleasure that we should receive it. May we not observe also the hallowing influence of this prayer on a desire which more perhaps than any other is liable to stray into extravagance and self-indulgence. We cannot suppose that Christ intended the prayer which he gave to his disciples to be more than a sample, whose simplicity and spirituality they would do well to imitate. But accepting it as a sample we cannot fail to be struck with the singular moderation of its claim for outward blessings, especially when we remember that with Christ prayer and desire were identical.

Translating physical want into the language of prayer restored it to its true position, and spiritualized the gratification of appetite. Food convenient for us, to be eaten with holy content, we need not

be ashamed to ask for from Him who bestows the higher blessings of the Spirit. But vicious appetite stumbles at prayer, and cannot put in its plea where reverence hallows the name of the Father, and breathes its aspiration that his kingdom may come, and his will be done on earth. I doubt whether the most spoiled and pampered pet of fortune could pray for those luxuries which he seeks so eagerly and permits to enter so largely into his thoughts. To utter the Lord's Prayer in sincerity would make his soul recoil from the false estimate which it had placed upon earthly good ; for is it not hypocrisy to pray for daily bread, and yet cherish a frame of mind which would prove ungrateful and rebellious if nothing more than daily bread were given ? Let our prayers be the measure of our desires ; and seeking from God those things which are lawful for us let us rest in him with confiding love, eating our bread with gladness and singleness of heart, and spending in his service the strength which he bestows. And then, with our daily bread, he will give us more and more plenteously the bread of eternal life, and shed abroad in our hearts that holy Spirit of love which he poured in such abundance on the infant Church.

CHAPTER IX

DIVINE FORGIVENESS

THE prayer that God will forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors, falling as it does into two related clauses, naturally suggests to us three distinct branches of inquiry, the nature of Divine forgiveness, the nature of human forgiveness, and the relation between them. In dealing with these high subjects, although our attention is chiefly directed to some of the most universal wants and feelings of the heart, it is nevertheless no easy task to frame a satisfactory theory, one which will at the same time meet the requirements of reason and shed a light upon our spiritual experience, which will at once rise to the grandeur of the theme and humble itself to the test of the simple instincts of devotion. We can only hope that, in spite of some formal error, truth of feeling may be preserved, and that when our short-sighted reason goes astray the communion of the Spirit may not be violated. With this caution I may venture to suggest a few thoughts on the Divine forgiveness.

An ingenious and subtle objection to every doctrine of Divine forgiveness meets us at the opening of our inquiry. It is said that in ascribing

forgiveness to God we are transferring to him our own imperfections, and acting on the groundless assumption that what is a virtue in us cannot be a blemish in him. A forgiving disposition is an excellence in those who are liable, when they inflict punishment, to exceed the claims of justice, and in their feeling to cherish an unwarrantable bitterness; but where this liability is absent, pardon is out of place. In forgiving we either remit a penalty or lay aside a feeling of resentment. Neither of these acts can be attributed to God. He cannot remit a penalty, because his punishments are strictly commensurate with sin. To each act of rebellion he assigns the precise amount of penalty which it deserves, and to withdraw any portion of this would be inconsistent with his justice. Sin ought to bear its punishment, neither more nor less than in the eye of eternal justice it has merited; and a wise man will have no desire to escape, believing it to be far better that the great law of retribution should remain intact.

And, on the other hand, God cannot lay aside a feeling of resentment, because he never possessed it. He is unchangeable love. His feelings cannot vary like the feelings of a man; and as he intends finally to gather all men to himself, and as time is to him an 'eternal now,' he regards all as potentially righteous. In the present taint he sees the future glory, and behind the fallen countenance of the murderer detects the placid eye of meekness and self-control. Saints and sinners stand on the same level in his affection; for he views the abiding essence, and not the temporary failings, and knows that even through the haunts of infamy man is pursuing his way to the highest good. Forgive-

ness, then, though a virtue in the creature, is a mark of his imperfection, and therefore disappears in God, whose acts are characterized by immutable justice and immutable benignity.

At first sight, while we admire the ingenuity of this objection, and are a little perplexed by the coils which it throws around us, we feel that somewhere in it there must be a fallacy ; for it says in effect that forgiveness becomes less in proportion to our readiness to forgive, and if only we forgave instantaneously we should not forgive at all ; and thus this high Christian virtue, by becoming perfect, ceases to exist. A brief consideration, however, of the two members of the objection may assist us in clearing our views.

In the first place, I see no ground for the assertion that it is inconsistent with absolute justice to remit, upon certain conditions, a portion of the outward penalty merited by sin. This is the assumption on which the Calvinistic doctrine of atonement rests ; and it is curious to find it reappearing in a school which probably considers itself at the other pole of the religious world. It depends on the very questionable principle that suffering is an equivalent for sin, and that the only possible way of restoring the moral balance of the universe is by assigning to certain quantities of guilt corresponding quantities of pain. But I can discover no tendency in pain to compensate for sin. Sin is not literally a debt, which may be repaid in different ways ; and we have no right to a choice whether we will pay God in suffering or in obedience. A moral offence, when committed, cannot be washed away in tears, or annihilated by the groans of torture ; and if we only admit the

principle that suffering is an equivalent for sin, I think the Calvinist is right in maintaining that nothing short of infinite torment will compensate for even the smallest breach of the moral law.

But the truth is, pain is no compensation for sin, and has no conceivable tendency to diminish the amount of past guilt. The most severe flogging cannot abrogate the foulness of a lie, or years of agony make a diabolical murder anything but diabolical. If we only try to estimate what intensity and duration of pain may be set over against a given amount of moral evil, as being exactly sufficient to satisfy the requirements of justice, we shall soon convince ourselves how futile is the attempt. For instance, how many hours or days of toothache would restore the moral order outraged by an unkind look, or how many weeks of starvation would cover up an act of hypocrisy? These things are absolutely incommensurable; and there is therefore no ground for assuming that each sin is entitled to a certain irremovable amount of penal suffering.

Suffering is, however, undoubtedly attached to sin; and we have a deep conviction that it is attached to it by a certain fitness, which we express by saying that it is deserved. It answers two very obvious purposes. It is a strong expression of moral disapproval, for degraded natures perhaps the only one that they are capable of feeling, and for all but the most advanced supplying to the conscience a wholesome stimulus. It opposes itself also as a barrier in the way of sin. It fights against the wicked with their own weapons. For men do wrong in pursuit of some fancied pleasure; and then retribution steps in, announcing the law that

self-will shall not end in self-gratification, and proving that wickedness is as blind as it is guilty. So far we recognize an appropriateness in penal suffering. But there is nothing here to fix an unvarying amount of punishment for particular offences. As soon as the punishment has fully answered its purposes, it ceases to be appropriate ; and its amount is therefore dependent upon very variable conditions, and may be continued or remitted without reference to the gravity of the offence for which it was originally inflicted. An obstinate impenitence may demand a prolongation of penal suffering which would be unsuitable after sincere and complete repentance.

At present the penalty of death is attached to the crime of murder. Now supposing the crime to have been of the most atrocious character. Nevertheless if we had conclusive proof that the culprit clearly saw and utterly loathed the enormity of his offence, that his self-will was gone and revengeful passion dead, that he had become a new man, and was in reality as fit for the society of heaven as it is commonly pretended that he is, and that, if he were liberated, he would henceforward be one of the holiest, kindest, and most useful members of the community, where would be the suitability of hanging him ? Why not pardon the crime, in the sense of remitting the penalty ? In such a case conscience would have achieved all that you could hope to accomplish by the most relentless punishment ; and to put to death a man who once was bad, but is now a saint, seems to me to be far from satisfying our feeling of justice. If we leave out of account the effect upon others, or imagine a community which needs no deterrent example, it would appear to be

an act of unmeaning and wanton barbarity. But if it be contended that it is necessary to hang this saintly man in order that false hopes may not be excited in the breasts of future murderers, then the ground is changed, and the crime is made unpardonable, not because the remission of a deserved penalty is inconsistent with justice, but because it might endanger the public safety.

I have here suggested an extreme, perhaps impossible, case. In general the first moment of repentance is uncertain, and amendment is a tedious process, marked by many a relapse ; and for this reason a continuance of punishment may often be required long after the first signs of penitence have become apparent, for the suffering is needed to remind the still forgetful conscience and stimulate the reluctant will. But we feel that the justification of the punishment vanishes in proportion to the depth of penitential regret and the reality of improvement, and that, though our disapproval of the sin that has been committed can never be reversed, nevertheless the infliction through which that disapproval expresses itself may, upon certain conditions, be justly relaxed or set aside. If the principle here enunciated be a sound one, then we must admit that God is ' faithful and just ' in forgiving us, even in the sense of removing a part or the whole of the punishment which else we should have incurred, when we make a contrite and sincere confession ; and that awful justice which is satisfied with torment, and can accept physical pain as redressing a wrong to the affections and a reparation of insulted law is but a fiction of theologians.

I have dwelt at such length on this portion of our subject for the simple purpose of making clear the

principle that the remission of punishment upon sincere repentance is quite consistent with the purest justice, and that forgiving is not confined to the remission of that surplus and undeserved pain which human vengeance so often desires to inflict. But the outward punishment is by no means what is uppermost in the thoughts when we pray to be forgiven. We desire to escape from a sense of alienation between ourselves and God. We do not wish to be delivered from any purifying pain, but to be brought once more within the circle of God's approving love. Is it said that we are never outside of that circle, because God is immutable and his feeling is undisturbed by the shifting winds of human passion and sin? I know not on what such an assertion can be based; and it is surely derogatory to the character of God to say that he is blind to the chasm which separates the righteous and the wicked, and that they both stand upon the same level in his regard.

The immutability of his character must depend upon the permanence of the same great principles, and not upon its incapacity for varying relations. He is always just, always kind, always patient, always true in his moral judgment; but for that very reason his relation to us must change with the varying conditions of our life, and now we are warmed with the sun of his approval, and now the cloud of his disapproval hangs darkly over our heads. No doubt the emotions connected with our own moral judgment are but earthly symbols of what passes in the mind of God, and all our language concerning him is inadequate, and points dimly towards the Divine reality. But still our poor figures are nearer the truth than either the

despair of knowing him at all or the assumption that he is possessed of one unchanging feeling, a sea without a ripple, that borrows no form from the islands that rest in its bosom. Till we know more we may be content to use in reference to God the language of our own purest and least passionate moral life, and to speak of the disapproval, or even of the displeasure, which he entertains towards sin and towards the sinner—a disapproval and a displeasure which, as those know who have felt as Christians ought towards one who has offended, are quite compatible with earnest, deep-souled love.

For what is our experience when we have sinned ? Does all go on as before ? Is there the same charm in the thought of God, the same gladness in his presence ? Do we seek his face with the same simple confidence, or do we turn from it, finding that its brightness is terrible ? Does not a cold cloud of estrangement come between us, a cloud, it may be, which is altogether on our side, but which nevertheless comes by a law that God has ordained, and is dependent on the certainty that he does and must disapprove of what we have done ? Did it so please him, he could make us feel his love as before, and cause us to rejoice in him as a parent unchangeably fond, and write no sentence of condemnation on our hearts. But it is not so. A blindness comes upon the soul, and with fallen countenance we go out from the presence of the Lord. And while we remain impenitent we feel bitter and defiant. We will not believe in that love which is ready to forgive and save. It may seek admittance to our hearts ; but it can gain access only through the path of penitence, and that

is choked with pride. The seasons that used to come to us fraught with blessedness now bring only the burden of our shame. We start at the wind's solemn moan as though it were the voice of an accusing God; and the expressive stillness and mystic light of evening no longer lull the spirit into their own peace.

Is not this what Christ describes under the figure of 'outer darkness,' not a violent feeling, not a rending pain, but a sense of dreary isolation, of forfeited friendship, of lost communion? This, while we are still young in evil, and desire to be with God, is terrible, and carries to the religious mind a deeper and more vivid meaning than the most elaborate description of penal fires. But these latter also have their counterpart in spiritual experience. Those who are hardened in sin become accustomed to their want, and cease to dread the darkness. But the image of the holy One which they have despised is succeeded in their consciences by spectacles of horror. The flame of remorse consumes them, and will not be quenched. We read of an emperor whose guilty soul was haunted by the spectre of his murdered brother, who continually held to his lips a cup of blood, saying, 'drink, brother, drink.' Thus imagination, designed to set before us an ideal beauty and goodness, conjures up the demons of avenging justice and creates its own hell around it. Such is the Divine appointment; and what clearer proof could we have of God's righteous disapproval, I might even say holy indignation against sin?

What, then, is it to be forgiven? Is it not to regain the tender approval of God, to feel once more in our hearts his breath of life, and to walk

in the light of his countenance ? Is it not possible for him to remove the incipient blight, to disperse the gathering gloom, to restore the joy of his salvation ? Surely it is possible ; and his love is a pledge to us that he will when we turn to him in faith. For our Father never ceases to love us, but he it is that pleads with us in our lonely sadness or haunting fears. He would rejoice to have a child on whom the smile of his approval could rest once more ; and may we not say that his Holy Spirit is grieved whenever the perversity of men makes it needful that his displeasure should abide upon them ? Yes, God is at once our faithful Judge and our loving Father, and there is forgiveness with him. For may not his approval be justly restored to us when in the sincerity of our hearts we ask him to forgive ? We might, it is true, ask selfishly, merely to be delivered from the suffering we have justly incurred. But this would not be prayer. When we pray to be forgiven, we offer up the sacrifice of contrition, we lay down our broken pride, and, owning ourselves unworthy, desire only to be allowed once again to love, to adore, to obey. Oh ! if we might but touch the hem of his garment, or bathe his feet with our tears, or catch the distant music of his voice, or even in sad and lonely penitence be permitted to work his will. When we pray to be forgiven, we ask not for ourselves, but that his wounded love may grieve over us no more, nor his holy law be violated by our weakness and guilt. And his whisper steals upon the soul, thy sins are forgiven thee ; thy faith has saved thee ; go in peace. ‘Blessed is the man to whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile.’

CHAPTER X

HUMAN FORGIVENESS

IN considering the nature of the Divine forgiveness we saw that one of the conditions on which it is bestowed is repentance. The existence of this condition is implied in the simple fact of sincerely praying to be forgiven. It is not difficult to see the reasonableness of this condition ; for penitence implies a change to a better state of mind, one more worthy of moral approval, while impenitence amounts to a prolongation of the original offence and a proud attempt to justify what ought to be deplored and renounced as without excuse. But another condition is involved in the form of prayer which we are considering, the reason of which is not perhaps equally obvious. The prayer, indeed, as it stands in Matthew's Gospel, introduces only a comparison between Divine and human forgiveness—Forgive us in the same kind of way that we forgive, or, as it ought to be translated, forgave our debtors. But such a comparison or plea would hardly be used unless it were felt that the fact of our having forgiven an offence entitled us in some measure to be forgiven. In Luke's version this is made the express ground on which our hope of forgiveness

rests—‘for we also forgive every one that is indebted to us.’ Christ’s words also at the conclusion of the prayer, as recorded in Matthew, are very explicit—‘For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you ; but if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.’ Equally emphatic are the words at the close of the parable of the unforgiving servant—‘So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses.’ These passages make it clear that in Christ’s view to forgive is an indispensable condition of being forgiven.

Now, when we reflect, this condition appears to fall in with our natural sentiments of justice. He does not seem to us entitled to be forgiven who is himself vindictive and implacable. Our purest moral indignation is aroused against the servant in the parable who, having experienced from his Lord such an amount of forbearance and pity, was then so merciless towards his fellow servant. And, on the other hand, we feel impelled to judge leniently the failings of the magnanimous to whom the sense of personal affront can never cling, and who view the offences of others, not through the distorting medium of wounded pride and ruffled selfishness, but in the pure light of a sound conscience and a large and loving heart. And when we draw near to God, what can seem more incongruous than to seek forgiveness at the very moment when we are cherishing spite or resentment ? The very words which Christ uses seem to arise spontaneously in the conscience, ‘Go first and be reconciled to thy brother.’

So immediate is this answer to our prayer that a sincere man cannot ask to be forgiven, and at the same time harbour feelings of revenge. The trespass committed against himself appears as nothing in comparison with his own ill-desert towards God ; and the sense of Divine Love which he seeks for himself kindles in his breast the torch of love towards others. But he who will not part with his resentment soon offers his prayer to be forgiven only as the vapid formalism of a hypocrite, and his conscience becomes seared with a hot iron, and crusted over with impenitence ; for the only way in which he can justify to himself his unforgiving temper is by pretending that he has nothing to be forgiven, but can appear blameless in the sunlight of Divine Justice. Poor, dark soul, worshipping self and feeding on vanity, treasuring up the Divine displeasure against that day when it shall find that there is indeed a judgment to which all are amenable, and awake at last to the awful sense of its own darkness and guilt. Alas ! for those who forget their own unworthiness, and mete to others that hard measure which meted to themselves would sink them in perdition.

Thus it appears consonant to our feeling of justice that readiness to forgive should be required as a condition of our being forgiven. But further, if we recall to mind for a moment the nature of the Divine forgiveness, we shall see that this condition is inevitable. For the most important part of God's forgiveness is the restoration of approval and communion. And what is communion but participation of the same spirit, thought answering to thought, feeling to feeling, the heart beating responsive to the movements of perfect goodness, the indwelling

in us in some humble measure of those moral attributes which dwell in God in their absolute purity ? Where, then, can be our communion when our spirit is in direct opposition to his, when our hate stands over against his love, our revenge against his justice, our impatience against his forbearance, our hardness against his pity ? It is simply impossible that, while we cherish feelings like these, we can enter within the circle of Divine communion. They are from beneath, not from above ; and they must be cast out, and laid with tears of sorrow on the altar, before we can see the light of God, and feel the blessedness of his children. In vain, while we refuse to sacrifice them, do we stretch forth our hands in prayer, in vain we counterfeit the language of penitence, and cry ‘ Return, O Lord, how long ? ’ No ! He cannot return to a polluted shrine, or breathe his peace upon our hearts, till we are content to surrender all into his hands, and, listening to the dictates of his Spirit, to allow it to dwell within us, to mortify our proud pretensions, and through us to love, to forgive, to heal.

And now we may inquire more particularly into the nature of this condition which is imposed upon us. What is it in us to forgive ? Clearly, if man were perfect, and his moral judgment subject to no disturbing elements of passion and self-interest, forgiveness in him would follow the same law as in God, and be rendered only on the fulfilment of the same conditions. The Christian precept cannot be intended to abolish our discrimination between right and wrong, or require us to accord the same approval to the one as to the other. We are not asked to do away with all punishment, or to regard with equal favour the man of honour and the swindler. There

is a point where forgiveness, in its complete extent, ought not to step in, and where it would be wrong to treat the offender as though he were not an offender. If men were absolutely impartial, their sense of justice would lead them right, their forgiveness would follow the Divine law ; and it would be unnecessary to bestow a separate treatment upon the subject.

But in us the exercise of the Christian virtue of forgiveness consists largely in the endeavour to attain to this perfect impartiality of judgment, and to lay aside all those acts and feelings which spring from mere personal considerations. It is our proneness to overstep the limits of justice, and to estimate offences, not from their intrinsic evil, but from their bearing on ourselves, that renders the Christian commandment so needful and so imperative. Few men are able to judge of offences in which they are personally concerned precisely as they would judge of them if related in a fiction. Our self-love makes us more lenient towards our own sins, but more severe towards trespasses committed against us. We are in danger also, for the same reason, of retaining even a just indignation long after the Divine rule would require us to lay it aside, and of refusing to forgive our brother and return into relations of cordial amity when he comes to us, saying, I repent. Now the Christian principle of forgiveness enjoins upon us to abstain from every act and feeling that in the least transgress the strict requirements of justice, and, if we are betrayed into them in temporary heat, speedily to resume a better frame of mind, and not allow the sun to go down upon our wrath. All bitterness of feeling, all desire to retaliate, all sense of pleasure in viewing the suffering or misfortune of one who has offended, are unconditionally forbidden.

These things are inherently and for ever bad, themselves moral transgressions of the gravest character, and cannot be made righteous by any enormity in the offence that has been committed.

‘Love your enemies’ is a rule of permanent and absolute obligation, and whatever violates this rule is inconsistent with the mind of Christ. This is the surest test which we can apply to our own hearts, to see whether we are cherishing the forgiving temper which as Christians we ought to possess. Can we say sincerely, as in the sight of God, I love the man who has trespassed against me ; I honour his virtues, and truly grieve for his failings ; if he has indeed sinned, I would sacrifice much to restore him ; according to my opportunity I will endeavour to overcome his evil with good ? If we can do this, following the will of Him who is Love, then our judgment will be just, and our forgiveness will be conformed to the Divine rule. But how seldom do men act thus, how little reality there is in our Christian profession, and with what a small amount of seriousness do we bend our souls before the spirit of the gospel. We deem the principles of Christ too fine for earthly use ; and the world is full of broken friendships which he would heal, and of animosities due to the merest trifles nursed into monsters by our unloving imagination.

It is not indeed easy to love an enemy, and to maintain inviolate the sweetness of Christian charity through all misunderstandings and difficulties. But is nothing incumbent upon us which requires toil, self-sacrifice, and prayer ? Have we ever tried to love as Christ loved ? How many hours have we spent in a solemn and deliberate endeavour to root out from our hearts an unchristian feeling, and re-

ceive there the faith that works by love ? Difficult indeed it is to stay the flood of bitter passion, more difficult to tear away the cold resentment that has twined itself around us and struck its fibres deep into the soul. But with God all things are possible, and to him who rests in God the victory is given. If any man will kneel down, determined not to rise till the Divine grace comes and hallows his feelings, breathing peace and love where before were enmity and dislike, assuredly that grace will come, and he will rise a humbler, a stronger, and a more forgiving man. Yes ! the life of the Spirit is no dreamy fiction ; but they that seek shall find.

The same self-love which so often induces us to overstep the bounds of justice, and to cherish an unforgiving temper, is apt also to make our forgiveness incomplete, and far short of what a true generosity would accord. That which we profess to have forgiven ought to be buried in the past, blotted out of the records of memory as though it had never existed. If the offence is treasured up, to be used as occasion may serve for our own glorification or for inflicting a sting, we are laying claim to Christian magnanimity under false pretences. I fear we sometimes thus deceive ourselves. We think we have forgiven our brother his trespass ; but we have not perfectly healed the rankling wound, dispelled the cold suspicion that hangs like a mist between us, or restored the frank and cordial look of friendship. It is sad to hear any man say of another, I will forgive him, but his presence has become distasteful to me, and I shall avoid him, for I shall never feel pleasure in his company again. This is not to forgive, but to foster a gloomy and unchristian resentment. Supposing God were to reply to that man's prayers, I

forgive you, but I must banish you from the light and warmth of my presence for evermore, would he have the blessed sense of pardon in his soul as he plunged into the dreary wilderness? Yet this is what we sometimes regard in ourselves as a stretch of Christian charity.

Again, we sometimes bring up an offence which we profess long ago to have condoned, thus awakening painful recollections, and removing all the grace of our pardon. If we fancy that we have placed a man under an obligation to us because we have dealt leniently with him, we have not forgiven him at all; we have simply sold so much apparent kindness for an equivalent of expected service. To stab the susceptibility of a wounded conscience, and open its scars afresh, is certainly not to forgive; and the magnanimity which boasts of itself thereby commits suicide, and degenerates into meanness.

Another way in which we occasionally neutralize our attempts to forgive is by talking of the offence to others. He who has forgiven will be careful to shield his brother's fame. He will defend him when he is assailed with the careless and cruel insinuations of those who rejoice more in iniquity than in the truth. He will experience real pain when his character is jeered at, or the injurious whisper creeps upon its stealthy round. If we are conscious of any pleasure in hearing ill said of the man who has trespassed against us, we may be sure that we have not forgiven him. Forgiveness is open, manly, generous, rising above the petty instincts of self-love, scorning the mean tricks of feeble and cowardly natures, more ready to believe the good than the evil, quick in finding excuses, slow to discover an affront, rejoicing to promote

goodwill, yearning to restore. If we forgive, let us forgive utterly and for ever, remembering that love is stronger than hatred, and evil can be overcome only by good.

If men would act consistently in this spirit, it would be a far happier world. A vast mountain of unreasonable indignation and ruffled pride would be torn up and cast into the sea. For probably a great majority of so-called offences are not moral offences at all, but merely jars against our self-will. It is almost an abuse of words to speak of forgiving such offences, because we have no right to be offended, and in the eye of supreme justice it is we who are morally guilty and need to be forgiven. The Christian temper, the disposition to measure all men and things by their relation to eternal truth and right, and not by their bearing on our personal interests and fancies, would sweep away this whole class of offences. We should be no more nettled by a difference of opinion or even by a personal slight than we are by a clap of thunder or by the rain blowing in our faces. Let us manfully accept the conditions amid which we are placed, and by our love endeavour to reduce to harmony the warring elements of human character and thought. When love takes possession of our hearts, we shall view things as with the eye of God ; and whosoever sins we remit, they shall be remitted ; whosoever we retain, they shall be retained ; because the passions that disturb our judgment will have fled ; we shall not erect our own false standards, and condemn the guiltless ; but the everlasting justice will manifest itself in us, and direct us by its own impartial rule. Then we may assure our hearts before God, and humbly

believe that we shall taste that mercy which we have administered, and feel within us that peace which we have sought to diffuse around us. Then we may offer the prayer of sincerity, and plead that we too have forgiven, and that no heart is sad because we are unrelenting.

CHAPTER XI

TEMPTATION

A DIFFICULTY is felt by many persons in using the clause of the Lord's Prayer which asks God to 'lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil'; for it seems to imply that God is capable of tempting men, and certainly the character of a tempter is the very last that we can ascribe to him. To tempt another into evil is an act which we speak of as diabolical, and we more strongly condemn one who entices another into sin than one who is content to sin alone. On this subject the language of the Epistle of James seems to express our natural sentiments—'Let no man say, when he is tempted, I am tempted of God; for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man; but every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed.' This is what piety is always ready to confess. God allures us only to good; and when we are tempted, the evil is in ourselves. A prayer, then, that God will not lead us into temptation appears to be utterly unsuitable, and to have its source in the most unworthy suspicions of his fatherly goodness.

Some endeavour to escape this difficulty by

substituting for the word temptation the word trial, which is at least equally true to the meaning of the original. The prayer is then supposed to have special reference to the trials and hardships which the first Christians were destined to encounter, and to relate not so much to the allurements of sin as to the severity of persecution. Those who were to maintain the profession of their faith in the midst of constant peril, perhaps to be nailed to a cross, or slowly roasted to death at the stake, or to glut with their flesh the hungry jaw of the lion, might well sigh for happier times, and pray that the fiery trial might roll past their doors. This is an explanation which the words will certainly admit; but it may be doubted whether it greatly relieves the difficulty which it is intended to remove. For the word trial, although it is commonly applied to events which involve some kind of suffering, has nevertheless no relation to the painfulness of an occurrence, but expresses the fact that we are put to the proof, and that it is unusually difficult for us to maintain a high tone of mind, in short that we are tempted to some kind of moral evil, such as murmuring, distrust, or falsehood. The persecutions endured by the early Christians were trials, not because they were attended with fierce suffering, but because they offered them a distinct temptation to deny their faith, and renounce their allegiance to Christ.

Accordingly trial may come, not only in the form of threatened or actual pain, but of proffered pleasure; and a man's virtue is as truly proved when he is surrounded with opportunities of sin without exposure to the usual penalties as when

he is persecuted or plunged into unaccustomed grief. In both cases it is the commingling element of temptation that constitutes the trial; and could this element be entirely withdrawn, pain would lose all moral significance, and we should cease to describe as trials the various afflictions and hardships of life. Although, therefore, we may soften the apparent harshness of this portion of the Lord's Prayer by giving it a reference, not to the universal wants of man, but to the peculiar sufferings to which the first followers of Christ were exposed, we do not thereby avoid any real difficulty; for the prayer cannot be understood as referring to suffering simply as such, but only to that kind of suffering which would tempt the disciples to abjure their faith. We may as well retain the ordinary translation, and give to the passage a more comprehensive reference.

The word trial, may, however, suggest to us the true solution of our difficulty; for it is employed, I think, to denote chiefly the outward circumstances by which a man's virtue is tested, while the word temptation brings more prominently into view the inward enticing, or feeling of inclination, which makes the moral result so doubtful. If we examine a complete act of temptation we shall find that it involves two distinct elements; and in proportion as we refer at different times to one or other of these elements some confusion, and even apparent contradiction, may arise in our language. On each of these we must bestow a few moments' attention.

It is evident, in the first place, that before any temptation can arise a certain condition must exist in ourselves. Temptation is produced by a sort of

concurrence between the inner and the outer worlds, constituting a peculiar relation between our minds and their circumstances. If we were not subject to the influence of desires and aversions, temptation could not assail us ; for surrounding opportunities would have nothing in us on which to fasten. You would in vain endeavour to tempt a tiger with pictures, or a horse with money ; because these animals have no desires standing in relation to such objects, and excited by their presence.

It is probably owing to the obviousness of this truth that we generally leave it unnoticed when we speak of a man's temptations. The desires which exist in human nature are assumed as a permanent and well-known ground ; and our attention is therefore more forcibly directed to the changing circumstances by which our desires may be captivated. We sometimes say, for instance, that a certain situation must present great temptations, and we carefully withhold from such a position those in whom we are interested. Here our care seems to be entirely bestowed on the outward conditions, and we say nothing of the mind itself ; but the inner conditions are assumed as the common property of mankind, and we feel that the temptation resides, not in the position, but in the propensities which find in that position unusual facilities for unlawful gratification. Destroy the propensities, and the seductiveness is gone ; and a change in our desires implies a corresponding change in the nature of our temptations. This truth we see frequently exemplified. What presents a dangerous attraction to one man is simply repulsive to another. The gin-palace which lures

many a victim to his ruin serves only to awaken sad thoughts and stimulate the philanthropic efforts of others. Vicious practices which appear so irresistible to some excite in the pure a shudder of repugnance. One man is tempted to be extravagant, another to be miserly ; one to be imperious and unyielding, another to be vacillating and soft. Thus temptations vary with varying mental tendencies ; and it is true that we are tempted *only* when we are led away and enticed by our own desires.

There is another condition more completely moral and more strictly dependent on ourselves, which appears to me indispensable to the existence of temptation ; and that is, a hesitating will. When the will is conclusively determined, temptation melts away as by magic, and it is only when it resigns its autocracy, and condescends to parley with the emissaries of base desire, that we become conscious of the tempter's charm. 'Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.' He will not waste his time in attacking an impregnable fortress. Make up your mind that your duty has to be done, and obstacles will not daunt you, or tempt you to turn aside, but only cause you to advance with more impetuous rush, nerve your courage, and quicken your inventive resources. If the will has immovably resolved that the unlawfulness of an act shall for ever deprive it of all title to be heard, you will no more be troubled by its importunity. It is because we hesitate, and stoop to an exchange of arguments with sin, that we are beguiled and lost.

Although no man has gained in every instance this superiority to temptation, yet it is not difficult to find examples which confirm the truth of our position. The man of true honour cannot be

tempted to embezzle, not because he is indifferent to the advantages and pleasures of wealth, but because, in this portion at least of the moral life, he has so conclusively resolved upon his course that in the midst of the most ample opportunities it does not even occur to him as a possibility that he might enrich himself by the sacrifice of his integrity. So, again, few men could be tempted to commit murder by such inducements as often lead to that crime, not because they are without the desires to which these inducements appeal, but because they have absolutely determined that under no circumstances is murder to be committed, and that no conceivable inducements would justify them in entertaining the question for a moment. These examples may enable us to perceive that a weak and faltering will is one of the internal conditions of temptation, and that in proportion as the will becomes strong and healthy temptation melts away.

The external element of temptation requires but a few words. Before we can be tempted we must not only have desires and a will open to attack, but we must have an opportunity of unlawfully gratifying our desires. The thief who never has it in his power wrongfully to appropriate money is as little tempted to embezzle as the man of honour. There may be gold in the moon ; but we are not tempted to go in search of it. As an explosion occurs only through the contact of the spark with the gunpowder, so temptation arises only through a correspondence between our inward predisposition and our outward opportunity. This is so evident as to require no further remark.

The necessity for the two elements which have been described suggests two distinct methods of

dealing with temptation. It may be removed by either an inward or an outward change. Christianity, recognizing the fact that moral evil resides, not in circumstances, but in the hearts and wills of men, has addressed itself particularly to the internal field. It would not take men out of the world, and place them where there is no opportunity for sin ; but it would keep them from the world's evil by rendering them superior to its attractions. That sin should not express itself in any overt act is a small matter if it be only biding its time, lurking in the diseased imagination and throwing its coils around the crippled resolution. Christianity would drive it from its seat in the soul, and raise men above their temptations by sanctifying their desires and restoring its lost power to the will.

Christ manifests little inclination to withdraw men into paths of ease, where their moral energy will never be put to the proof, and the pain of self-denial never experienced. He has little hope from any mere reshaping of the constitution of society, and adapting its arrangements to suit our weakness and guilt, but requires every heart to be surrendered to God and move in instant obedience to his will, though the stars may fall and the powers of heaven be shaken. Circumstances are what we make them, an army of tempting fiends for the unholy, for those who love God a host of angels working together for good. This method of dealing with temptation is abundantly recognized, though not in express terms, in the former portion of the Lord's Prayer. The recognition of God as our Father, the reverence which hallows his name, the entrance of his kingly rule into our souls, raise

us to the dignity of his children, and by enduing us with the Spirit of the Son give us the victory which overcomes the world.

The clause of the prayer which we are at present considering seems, however, to refer to the other method of deliverance from temptation, namely, the removal of the outward opportunity. The external element is most naturally suggested by the idea of leading into temptation; and if we give to the words this special reference, the difficulty with which we started finds an easy solution. We have seen that the moral evil resides, not in the circumstances, but in the mental inclination; and therefore God may bring us into circumstances by which our virtue will be proved, without in any way encouraging the commission of sin. That we are continually brought into such circumstances is a fact of daily experience; and the question is, who brings us? Some theologians answer, the devil; the Lord's Prayer answers, God, the wise and loving Father, who knows our frailties, and our needs. He brings us into these outward trials, these opportunities of sin, not with diabolical intent, that we may defile our souls, and swear allegiance to the kingdom of darkness, but that we may strengthen our virtue, and assert the power of a pure heart and a consecrated will. God does not tempt us to evil; he tempts us to show our fidelity and hardihood, but we through our sinful desires and faithless will convert the field of heroism and glory into a field of treachery, desertion, and shame. Without the collision of circumstances moral probation would be impossible, and virtue would cease to grow. Christ and Judas would seem upon the same level; and with the darkness

of the betrayal would disappear also the radiance of the cross.

If like good soldiers of Jesus Christ we perceive the Divine meaning of the trials of our virtue, then, instead of repining like cowards, we shall see that they are all solicitations heavenward, and that the cross which we thought we could not bear raises us to the right hand of God. To the pious heart there is deep comfort in this doctrine that it is God who arranges our tempting opportunities of sin ; for it is a pledge to us that they will be adapted to our moral condition, that we shall not be tried beyond our strength, and that he who orders to the battle will also provide his faithful servants with impenetrable armour. Did not his fatherly hand direct these temptations, we could have no reliance that we might not be borne down under their weight in spite of every effort ; but now we are assured that our trials and difficulties will be proportioned to our power of resistance, and that the loyal soul shall not be vanquished. But, on the other hand, all excuse is taken away from sin. ‘ Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God.’ The seduction to evil is altogether in himself, and his opportunities for sin are also opportunities for virtue. God knows his strength and weakness, and has assigned him a task which he *can* accomplish if he *will*. Let him attach the blame to himself, and not charge God foolishly.

But it may be asked, if God apportions to us the outward element of temptation as a necessary moral discipline and condition of spiritual growth, ought we to pray not to be led into it ? Will not God lead us right without our poor petitions ? Yes, doubtless, if in disusing the words we retain

the spirit of prayer. He who simply rests in God, receiving from hour to hour whatever he may send, and fulfilling the duty which he enjoins, prays without ceasing. Although no words may tremble on the lips, there is a true communion, as when two friends sit silent in the consciousness of perfect sympathy. I can defend the prayer not to be led into temptation only as I attempted to defend the prayer for daily bread, by saying that it is the submissive expression of a desire, a pious and trustful breathing of the soul's inner want. It may be not only through humility, but through the weakness of our faith, that we shrink from the encounter with temptation, and fear that it may be too strong for us. To perfect faith there is no struggle, no sinking of the heart, no cry for help, so enfolded is it in the Divine Presence. But whether such a flower can grow on earth I know not. Sure it is that with most good men the heart does sometimes fail, trial appears formidable, the soul feels itself weak, and the prayer not to be led into temptation is a cry from the depths. And in no ungentle or reproachful voice the answer comes, 'Fear not, my child, for I am with thee; my arm shall support thee through the conflict, and though the cup may not pass, it will be my tender hand that will hold it to thy lips.'

Thus our trust is restored, and the very diffidence which prompted our prayer is converted into a source of strength. He who goes to life's battle heedless of its dangers, and confident in his own might, speedily falls a victim to its snares; but he who, measuring its difficulties and knowing his weakness, seeks the direction of God, is armed at every point, learns the reality of a power not of

this world, and, having fought a good fight, receives at last a victor's crown.

The prayer against temptation passes naturally into an aspiration for deliverance from evil. We long for a complete redemption, an escape from every fetter that still holds us back from the freedom of sons of God. We would be holy temples of the Spirit, yielding ourselves to God, that his will may be done in us as in heaven, and that no inner defilement may mar the beauty of his universe, nor any rebellious act ever wound his love. Perfect righteousness is the goal of our being, deliverance from all that separates us from God, and full communion with Him, the primal Source of life and goodness, our adorable Creator, our righteous Judge, our loving Father.

Thus ends the prayer, so simple in its words, so grand in its thoughts, so profound in its devotion. The doxology which a later time has added is not unworthy of it. It is brief, comprehensive, and reverent, and breathes the true spirit of Christian self-surrender and adoration. May its words be always words of sincerity, and whether we bow in prayer before the throne of God, or mingle with our fellow men in the world's busy field, may we remember whose we are, and that to Him, and to Him alone, belong the kingdom, the power, and the glory for ever and ever.

WHEREFORE DIDST THOU DOUBT.

O gracious God, thy help I crave,
And in each grievous failure still would cling
To that blest hand held down to me to save,
And, sinking in doubt's sea, I yet would bring
Tears as an offering.

Yes, I would pray, and never faint,
And lay before thee all my poignant need,
That, raised once more from bitter sin's constraint,
I may to thy rebuke give patient heed,
And on thy goodness feed.

Yea, I have doubted, and have strayed,
And mournful cry, 'help thou mine unbelief.'
Thou who dost freely give, and not upbraid,
Thy pity moves to penitential grief,
That, loving, finds relief.

Remove the frailty of my will,
And dissipate through faith my shrinking fears,
That I may walk no more through ways of ill,
But offer songs of gladness, and not tears,
Throughout the coming years.

THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT
AND OTHER
TEACHINGS OF CHRIST

CHAPTER I

THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT

THOSE Christians who think the teaching of their Master is more important than that of the theologians of the fourth century must give a supreme place to the Sermon on the Mount, and will not be content to substitute for it the metaphysical creeds, be they true or false, which came into existence hundreds of years afterwards. It is true that even in regard to this great discourse many critical questions may be raised, and it has not been the will of God that the Divine message should be transmitted to us in the way which we in our ignorance might prefer. In the first place, it has been preserved only in a translation ; for we can hardly doubt that it was spoken in Aramaic. Again, we are dependent on the recollection of those who have transmitted it to us. Here, then, we have two sources of possible error, which not only justify us in giving it a liberal interpretation, but require us to interpret the details through the spirit of the whole discourse. And, once more, the two forms in which it is presented to us in Matthew and Luke differ not only in their circumstances, but in their contents, several sayings exhibiting important variations both in the words and

in the meaning, and Luke recording in quite another connexion some of the most beautiful sentiments which Matthew has grouped together in this single utterance. Our first Evangelist, after a brief general description of Christ's activity, places the sermon at the very beginning of his detailed account of the public ministry of Jesus, and evidently intends it to represent his characteristic teaching, and to express in one great collection of sayings the essential features of the new law of life.

If the author of our Gospel, for the purpose of giving a succinct view, has really made up this connected outline from fragments which belonged to different occasions, its value for us is not thereby impaired ; for there is no reason to doubt that it gives substantially a true picture of Christ's doctrine ; and the variations only show that we must use our own intelligence in the reception and application of what is said. Great and original thoughts impress themselves on the memory when the particular occasion on which they were uttered may fail to arrest our attention, and so may easily pass into oblivion ; and we may, accordingly, have every confidence that the grand principles which underlie the Sermon on the Mount are those which were dear to the heart of Christ, and which he was most anxious to make operative in the world. The practical acceptance of these principles is, indeed, emphatically declared to be Christ's own test of genuine discipleship. 'Why,' he asks, 'call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say ?' 'Every one who heareth these words of mine, and doeth them, shall be likened unto a wise man, who built his house upon the rock.' The emphatic conclusion of the Sermon on the Mount is Christ's

own answer to those who pretend to be Christians, and dismiss with a respectful sneer such transcendental morality. It is the answer which we should expect from the noble simplicity of a true messenger of God.

Great characters are distinguished by sincerity and disinterestedness. They feel that they have a mandate from the Father of their spirits, and to do his will, and finish his work, so engrosses their attention that they have no susceptibility for the pleasures of successful ambition, or the pains of wounded vanity. They are only distressed by expressions of admiration for themselves, when there is no practical sympathy with them in the ends which they have in view. Perhaps the teacher of religion is most exposed to the seductions of flattery and self-love, while at the same time his work is most completely ruined by them. We may still accumulate knowledge, though we covet the personal honour which it brings; but we cannot serve God and self, we cannot preach righteousness with the Divine authority which comes of absolute surrender to its claims, and at the same time yield ourselves to the corrupting pleasures of popularity. Yet he who touches the hearts of men, and brings them messages from heaven, will gather an admiring throng around him, and may forget his message in the flush of his own triumph; and thus the very power of his prophetic gift beguiles him into quenching the Spirit. But Jesus stood on such a height of communion with God that eager crowds hanging on his words, and titles of honour and loud hosannas, never blinded him to the sombre fact that, though many were called, few were chosen. He saw his success only in souls which,

under his influence, were inspired with a Divine life, and the multitudes which applauded him, but misunderstood or disregarded the word which God had put into his heart to speak, only filled him with sadness. This grand singleness of purpose, which cared only for the accomplishment of the Divine end, is what is meant by 'the simplicity of Christ'; and if we have any reverence for this detachment from worldly and selfish motives, we must not meet his sincerity with insincerity, and call him Lord, Lord, while we do not the things which he says.

It appears, then, that in Christ's view practice is the test of religion. This great lesson is apparent not only in the Sermon on the Mount, but in every part of Christ's teaching, and indeed in the New Testament generally. It is as prominent in Paul as in James, in the Fourth Gospel as in the Synoptics. If we love Christ, we shall keep his commandments, and at least *try* to govern our lives wholly by his Spirit. Our words and deeds are an expression of the dominant force within. A good man out of the good treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is good; and where the actions do not correspond with the profession, we may be sure that the inward life is lacking, and there is an element of insincerity in the character. This is indeed completely true only of the main current of our activity, and there may be many a backward eddy and much straying into devious channels, while yet the principal stream flows ever onwards towards the ocean of Divine righteousness. So long as we are imperfect, many a fault may appear which springs, not from deliberate choice, but from impulse which is still untamed; and, in spite of

these temporary failings, the permanent drift of our character may show that we are seeking the Divine Will. It is the dominant love of the heart and the settled purpose which determine what we are approximately now, what finally we shall be. If these are wrong, little outbursts of natural goodness will not prevent the approaching desolation; if they are right, unpremeditated retreats before sudden attacks of evil will not prevent the ultimate victory of good. With this qualification it is true that practice is the test of religion; and when we survey men's lives from a distance, so as to catch the total impression, and see the subordinate parts in their true proportion, their governing ideal becomes apparent, and from that which is without we discern that which is within also. The question, then, by which we are to prove ourselves, and judge of our Christian profession, is this—are we seriously trying to live in accordance with the principles of Christ?

Jesus evidently felt, when the multitudes drew around him to listen to his words, that the attachment to him which many exhibited was very superficial. There was something striking in his personality which riveted their attention; but they showed little appreciation or regard for the truths which he taught. Some, no doubt, came to him out of mere curiosity, to see what this new teacher, who was so unlike the scribes, would say. Others came to watch him, and seize any opportunity of checking by puzzling questions the career of one who thought so little of breaking the Sabbath, and presumed to teach a higher morality than the law of Moses. A third set may have been pleased with his eloquence, and thought him a

splendid speaker, although their hearts were doubly barred against the access even of such words as his. Others, again, avowed themselves his disciples, and thought they really meant it when they called him Lord, Lord, but were full of worldly motives, and had no regard for the spiritual Kingdom which he proclaimed.

Even among the twelve there were two who were anxious to sit on his right hand and on his left in his kingdom, and had no inkling that this meant doing and suffering most in the service of their brethren. The ardent Peter himself wished to be paid in kind for the sacrifices he had made, and needed the humiliation of his denial to reveal to him the true worth of his Master. And then there rises in the little chosen band the sad form of Judas, a man not without love and conscience, betrayed himself in the betrayal of his Lord, and realizing for the first time, through the despair of remorse, that there are greater things than silver and gold. As Jesus cast his eyes over the motley crowd, he could see that among those who hailed him as a heaven-sent teacher there were many with blinded eyes and hardened hearts, intent only on earthly glories and vengeance on their enemies, and to them he spoke in vain of love and forgiveness, of a treasure in heaven that faileth not, and a glory of soul which birds and lilies cannot rival. The people were astonished at his doctrine, for when had they heard the language of conviction like his, or seemed to come so close to the very sources of truth? But there was little of that reverent sympathy which, though silent, yet somehow makes itself known in the inward appropriation of the words that have been spoken.

And so he wound up his discourse with an appeal for greater sincerity, and a warning that they who only listened to his teaching, and did not practise what he taught, would be swept helplessly away in the day of trial.

Are we in better case now ? Those who profess to listen to the Sermon on the Mount, and bow the knee, saying, Lord, Lord, to him who uttered it, are not a little crowd of Galileans, but the most powerful and progressive nations in the world. Do they form a kingdom of heaven upon earth ? Could anyone divine, on taking a general survey of European society, that the spirit of Jesus was the secret inspiration of its life ? That on a close inspection he would find it here and there working as a hidden leaven, that he would see it now and again moving with the sweet and holy simplicity of its ancient grace and truth, it is happily impossible to doubt. But the salient features of our modern life would, I am afraid, lead him to the conclusion that the national professions of Christianity were only a blasphemous shriek of mocking adulation. Here he would see sensuality displaying itself with unabashed front, leaving its serpent trail in the character, and driving its victims by thousands to loathsome ruin. There he would see drunkenness robbing man of his god-like reason, brooding as a desolating plague over impoverished and degraded homes, and ending in some dark tragedy of misery and crime. Everywhere he would encounter the love of gain, creating false ideals and false estimates of men, turning into dishonourable trickery what might and ought to be honourable trade, gambling in the streets with pitch and toss, gambling with speculations and

bets on the Stock Exchange and the race-course, gambling in those places which are rightly named hells, as being avowedly temples of covetousness, consecrated to one of the meanest passions of mankind.

And sitting on a throne of universal empire is the war-spirit, whose wholesale rapine and murder is held in temporary check, not so much by the justice and good sense of nations, as by the diabolical art of its own inventions, which threaten such sweeping destruction as to make even the bravest and most reckless pause before lighting once more the flames of strife ; and meanwhile we are living under an armed peace, for which more is paid than would heal all the world's poverty, and we are training whole populations to be skilful butchers of their brethren whenever some foolish quarrel or guilty lust of power orders the carnage to begin. In this respect the world has never, I suppose, presented such a scene of civilized savagery as our own age, and it is only the numbing influence of habit that represses the horror with which good men ought to regard it. And yet the disciples of Cain shout hosanna to the Prince of Peace.¹

We may now bring under review the characteristic teaching of the sermon which makes such high claims on our allegiance.

What strikes us first is the dominant ethical note which not only marks its final appeal, but runs through the whole discourse. It is true that the moral demands rest on a profoundly religious basis, and have the grandest possible religious aim ; but it is, nevertheless, true that a certain quality of life is what is insisted upon throughout, and not

¹ The above passage was written before the terrible war.

a word is said about the necessity of holding any particular form of creed, or of observing any prescribed ceremonies. Everything of this kind that in later times has been regarded as belonging to the essentials of Christianity is conspicuously absent. This is surely a very significant fact ; and to explain away its significance by saying that Jesus held in reserve the very things that he was sent into the world to teach, and taught in their place a system fundamentally different, is neither reverent towards our Lord nor justified by the recorded history. The substitution of enforced belief in a number of metaphysical dogmas for the acceptance of the express teaching of Christ himself was an act of apostasy which has inflicted unparalleled evils on the world, checking the progress of truth, corrupting the moral judgment, and creating that bigotry which attained its genuine result in the torture-chambers of the Inquisition.

When one sees the diabolical instruments of pain which man has applied to his brother man, when one reads the sickening story of persecution and massacre which received ecclesiastical sanction, when one remembers how much of that spirit, impotent though it may be, remains at the present day, one is almost tempted to think that no man has ever been so utterly despised and rejected by the so-called Christian Church as Jesus Christ himself. There have indeed been saints in every age, in whose breasts faith in Christ has burned as a pure fire ; but that faith has yet to come to kindle the heart of Christendom, and purify it as a holy temple for the indwelling of the Divine Spirit. And, thank God, a brighter day is dawning on the world, and, in spite of reaction and bigotry, the

tender and lowly grace of Christ, his noble righteousness, and his all-embracing charity, are making their way among men, and redeeming them from the bondage of superstition and sin.¹

This, then, is the first impression which we receive as, in imagination, we stand among the listening crowd on the Galilean hill, that there is a holy and blessed life which would change the world into a paradise of God, and that, if we would really be disciples of him whose words have thrilled us while he spake as we have never heard man speak, we must enter into this life, and begin this very day to do the things which he says; and we come away with a strange love in our hearts, and with a feeling of Divine exaltation, as though this wonderful teacher had lifted us out of our common life, and brought us by the marvellous power of his own conviction into the very presence and glory of God.

In accordance with the ethical colouring of the Sermon on the Mount it is assumed throughout, especially in the closing sentences, that we have the power of responding to its grand appeal. There is no allusion to the weakness and incompetence of human nature, no admission that the powers of evil are too strong for us to contend with them. It assumes that righteousness is the highest good, the sovereign condition without which we cannot enter the kingdom of heaven, and that this righteousness is within our reach. It is altogether hopeful and stimulating, a clarion call to duty, a challenge to all that is strong and earnest and aspiring in our moral being. Its generous con-

¹ We must hope that the war is the last effort of the diabolical in man to resist its doom.

fidence in us arouses our confidence in ourselves, and stirs with the awakening summons of faith the sleeping power within us : we can because we believe that we can.

In saying this we may seem to intrude upon the thorny question of free will. This, however, is not the place to enter into the subtleties of a difficult and perplexing discussion. For practical purposes it is sufficient for us to rest upon the broad facts of the case. Whatever may be our theory, we are confessedly in some way responsible for our actions. Without this responsibility, without the power, be it more or less, of directing our own course, all moral life in the strict sense must disappear. On this the reproaches of conscience, the sense of ill-desert, the prayer for forgiveness, rest as their justification. Now, Jesus assumes throughout his teaching the fact of our moral responsibility. Whatever questions may be raised as to the position of St. Paul in this respect, none, I think, can arise in regard to that of his Lord. The supreme Teacher, who goes without argument or effort to the very roots of our spiritual being, represents it as within our own power whether we rear the fabric of our character on the rock or on the sand, and leaves us without excuse if we receive his words with an expression of empty admiration, and do not resolutely set ourselves to make them fruitful in our lives.

In taking this line he places himself on the side of the greatest teachers of Israel, and, even to some extent, of the popular and pharisaic view. His 'law' indeed, is widely different in kind from the traditions about which the Pharisees were so scrupulous, and he never suggests that we can

purchase the favour of God by certain external acts, whether of ritual or of morality. On the contrary, he thinks that duty has such an absolute claim upon a man that, when he has done all, he must still consider himself an unprofitable servant. But in doing so he assumes that we are able to perform the required duty, and that the unfaithful servant is to blame, and deserves to be punished ; and he demands from us, as a thing which we are able to render, a certain kind of conduct, and even a certain elevation of inward character. If anyone who is not accustomed to this view will take the trouble of reading with an open mind the record of his teaching, especially in the first three Gospels, he will be surprised to find how these assumptions are everywhere present ; and he will begin to think that we shrink from them because they make us so uncomfortable, and fill us with shame for having made such a miserable response to these exalted and confiding expectations. And perhaps it is partly because we are too faithless and too selfish, too unwilling to take up the cross daily and follow him, that we turn from this manly and wholesome teaching, and have recourse to views which, though they contain an element of truth, have a tendency, when accepted in a one-sided way, to enfeeble the character.

We must next inquire into the nature of the moral ideal which is brought before us in the Sermon on the Mount. We must learn this, not from express and formal statements, which would be ill adapted to such unsystematic and popular teaching, but by seeking the underlying principles which seem to be everywhere presupposed. Taking then, a broad view, I think we may say that the

ideal which Christ sets before us as our highest moral aim is a certain quality of interior life, which manifests itself in good works, and is its own reward. This position we must endeavour to establish and illustrate.

We may notice first the way in which Jesus proposes to fulfil the ancient moral law. Far from wishing to abrogate it he would make it more stringent ; and yet he would do so in such a way as to render it superfluous. He takes for examples some of the commandments which were directed against overt acts of wrong, 'Thou shalt not kill,' 'Thou shalt not commit adultery.' He carries these up to the inward impulses out of which they spring. We may not even be angry with a brother, because anger is the first stage of murder. A disciple, expressing the same thought, says, 'He that hateth his brother is a murderer.' Similarly the marriage relation is truly maintained only by perfect faithfulness and purity of affection, and any wish that it should be otherwise is a violation of that holy contract. And again, it is not sufficient to abstain from perjury. All that can render an oath necessary is some evil inclination in the heart ; and for true inward honour, yes and no, the simplest and most reverent form of speech, are sufficient. Now, this mode of fulfilling the law renders it, as St. Paul so clearly perceived, superfluous. Not that it can ever cease to be obligatory ; but he who has attained to this life of inward sweetness and holiness can have no wish to violate it. If the hearts of all men were thus cleansed, and tenanted by the spirit of justice and love, the whole apparatus of our criminal law might be swept away as a useless remnant of an unchristian and barbarous

age ; and that inward life, of which law is an imperfect expression, would manifest itself in countless delicate ways which no law could ever enforce.

Again, we may observe that throughout the Sermon, though there is abundant reference to actions, the main stress is laid on dispositions, meekness, purity, forgivingness, simplicity, trust, love. It is plainly laid down that men may have a very specious exterior, which is no true index of their character. The false prophet, intent, we may suppose, on his own popularity and gain, comes in sheep's clothing, but inwardly is a ravening wolf. Men may observe scrupulously the prescribed methods of prayer, and put on a sad countenance in their fasts, and thereby deceive the men whose applause they hope to gain. It is possible, then, to observe the law, and yet be a bad man. In Christian judgment we want to know, not what a man does, but what he is. And, nevertheless, action is the index of character ; and Christ insists on the necessity of our doing the will of God, and declares that by our fruits we shall be known. Yes, by our fruits ; that is, not by the stiff and formal submission of our will to the expectations of our fellow men, a submission which may spring from impure motives and make our lives a counterfeit, but by the thousand unbidden and spontaneous words and deeds which come straight from the heart, and bear the unmistakable impress of a gracious and noble mind. It is thus that the Christian judges himself, and even, passing beyond the outward signs to that of which he alone can be conscious, bows in lonely penitence for thoughts and feelings which are alien to the holiness of God.

If we have thus far proceeded on the right path, it follows that the actions which are enjoined in the Sermon on the Mount are not to be regarded as the literal requirements of a new law, but as illustrations of the kind of conduct which the disposition that is commended would produce. This view is fully borne out by the nature of the precepts themselves ; for it is evident that some are purely figurative, and others have reference to circumstances which no longer exist. For instance, the commandment to pluck out the right eye and to cut off the right hand if they become occasions of moral offence can never have been intended for literal observance, but expresses through a bold and striking metaphor the duty of cutting off occasions of wrongdoing, and of repressing, even by the most painful self-denial, whatever might lead us into sin. Again, the commandment to leave our gift before the altar, and go and be reconciled to a brother with whom we have been angry, can no longer be obeyed according to the letter ; for there is no altar at which we offer gifts. Nevertheless, the precept is not obsolete, for it pointedly illustrates the incongruity between an act of worship and the harbouring of ill will towards a brother man ; and we must observe it, whenever the occasion arises, by seeking reconciliation with our brother before we kneel down to seek reconciliation with God. Similarly, we can have no temptation to stand and pray in the corners of the street, for doing so does not belong to the religious customs of our time ; and we must obey the prohibition by avoiding all needless display of popular piety, and by being more constant in our private than in our public prayers.

A corresponding interpretation must be given to the command to anoint our heads and wash our faces when we fast. This illustrates the general principle that we are not to perform any religious act in order to attract the attention of our fellow men, or needlessly use ceremonies that might possibly gain for us a reputation for sanctity, but reserve our spiritual mourning and self-discipline for the eye of God alone. We may fairly extend this mode of interpretation to examples which we might literally follow. For instance, we are told, 'If any man would go to law with thee, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also. And whosoever shall compel thee to go one mile, go with him two.' These precise occasions might not arise once in a lifetime; but they contain a principle which we may frequently apply, that we ought to be ready to suffer wrong rather than be litigious and quarrelsome, and that even if men are exacting we ought to be obliging in rendering them small services. Thus it is the spirit that quickens, and not the letter; and the Christian's moral ideal is not a slavish obedience to an extraneous law, written in sacred Scriptures, but an inward life of holiness and love, which acts freely out of its own resources as occasion may arise. He is independent of the written law, not because he has passed into a lawless universe, where there is some substitute for righteousness, but because the sovereign spirit of righteousness, the Divine well-spring of all just law among men, dwells within his heart, and promptly legislates for that infinite variety of circumstances and conditions which no statute-law can anticipate.

The view which we have thus reached may enable

us to judge of two prohibitions, which have often been regarded as absolute laws, and as such have been generally repudiated. The commandment, 'Resist not evil,' or, perhaps more properly, 'the evil man,' if taken in its widest and most literal application, has not been ratified by the universal conscience of Christendom. But was it ever intended to be more than an indication of the temper which should govern our private relations? It means, do not be revengeful; suffer an injury or an insult rather than return it; and it probably has no reference whatever to those serious occasions on which, according to the most sober judgment, resistance becomes a duty.¹ A similar remark will apply to the precept, 'Swear not at all.' It might, indeed, be better if this were observed in the most literal sense; but it was perhaps directed, not against oaths solemnly and reverently taken, but against the prevalent habit of private swearing in relation to the most trivial matters.

The view that real righteousness is a form of inward life, and that therefore all improvement must proceed from within outwards, affords the explanation of a somewhat startling fact, which has been regarded as an objection to the Sermon on the Mount, and to the teaching of Christ generally. He says not a word about social and political wrongs. He does not burn with the fiery zeal of a patriot, but is quite content that Cæsar should have what his ambition has managed to secure. He looks forward, indeed, to a kingdom of God, and this must imply some harmonious condition of

¹ This topic has become so important at the present day that it must receive in the next chapter a fuller and separate treatment.

society ; but he has no speculations as to its government and organization. He deals always with the individual, with the private heart in which sin dwells ; and though it is true that he denounces a class, the scribes and Pharisees, he does so only on account of the prevailing insincerity of its members. He aims at redeeming society, not by altering its constitution, but by ennobling the units of which it is composed.

He must have felt that the indwelling spirit was the essential thing, and that, if only all hearts could be cleansed from sin, if all men could look upon one another as brothers, if all public and private relations were governed by justice and love, society would organize itself upon sound principles, and from time to time would remove those conditions which were found to tend towards moral degradation, and modify its institutions to suit the changing requirements of human life. And meanwhile, so long as men have to struggle against circumstances that seem oppressive or degrading, if only they can be morally awakened, they may rise superior to their surroundings, and turn hardship into a discipline of virtue. According to this principle social reform must grow from within, and cannot be imposed from without. Institutions which are out of relation with the moral and intellectual condition of the people will not work ; and the duty of the reformer is not to thrust a superfine constitution upon a people who are not fitted for it, but to modify existing arrangements so as to adapt them to growing moral and intellectual ideals.

I venture to think that the principle which is here laid down ought still to guide the action of

the Christian Church. Complaints are sometimes made that the Church holds itself aloof from the great social questions which agitate men's minds, and the mass of the people neglect it because it takes no interest in their secular affairs. But, in this respect, it is the proper function of the Church to attack the evil in men's hearts, and to inculcate those great principles of righteous conduct which are everywhere applicable. It does not follow that because religion concerns itself with every department of life, the ministry of religion is equally extensive. The man who is able to reach the soul, to touch the conscience, to fire the heart, may have neither time nor talent for doing the work of the statesman or the economist ; and yet he may inspire the statesman and the economist with the religious enthusiasm and the sense of justice which will enable them to do their proper work with zeal and efficiency. In the Church we seek for the Spirit of a Divine humanity ; and then, in our several fields of labour, we judge for ourselves what our duty is, and, when we take such part as we can in social and political work, we do so as members of the State, applying our minds to the problems before us under the inspiration of those great principles of equity and mercy to which we have consecrated ourselves in our common worship. Thus, in endeavouring to influence mankind, let the Church place first and in unchallenged supremacy the duty of reaching the souls of men, and sweetening, in the individual heart, the secret springs of life.

We have next to remark that this interior life is its own reward. It is always represented as the highest object of human desire ; and that which is

highest cannot be sought for the sake of anything beneath itself. It is therefore the supreme reward of human activity; and all inferior good, so far as it has any ulterior aim, must be followed for its sake. This view differs from that which is frequently held, and it has even been objected to the Sermon on the Mount that it teaches a selfish morality, and advises men to do good only for the sake of the promised reward. This objection is founded on the passages in which Christ speaks of a reward with our Father in heaven, and says that 'thy Father who seeth in secret shall recompense thee.' But this reward is contrasted with that which is desired by hypocrites, and therefore the very object of what Christ says is to show that our actions must be performed in the simplicity of a Divine motive, and not for any selfish end. The hypocrite prays, not because his heart would rise into communion with God, but that people may applaud his piety; and he has his reward; that is, he gets what he seeks, namely, the applause of men. So also the sincere man has his reward, and gets what he seeks. His private beneficence, which he will not even tell to himself, gives him a kinder and more tender heart. His secret prayer lifts him into a true communion with God. His cheerful and unnoticed self-denial chastens his soul, and imparts greater firmness to his character. So, then, to act for the sake of reward is to miss the heavenly reward, growth in the Divine life, the privilege of becoming, in some humble way, an expressive organ of Divine righteousness.

A similar explanation clearly applies to another saying, 'If ye love them that love you, what reward have ye? Do not even the publicans the same?'

The nature of the reward is suggested by the context, which is to the following effect : in loving those that love you, how do you become more god-like ? You merely obey the natural human instinct, which displays itself even in men whom you despise ; and therefore your doing so brings you no nearer to God. If you would win the prize of Divine perfection, love your enemies, and do good to the unthankful and the evil. In this passage Jesus sets forth quite plainly the ultimate reward—‘that ye may be sons of your Father who is in heaven.’ This sublime aim does not involve any selfish gratification, for the sake of which we submit to the moral law, but is itself the supreme consummation of morality, which includes within it all lower and particular precepts. The various admonitions which illustrate the spiritual law of Christ converge towards this one grand result, whereby Christian morality is placed upon a basis of the simplest and most profound religion. To go about our worldly business with the ever-present consciousness of an invisible realm of duty and love, and seeking to realize in ourselves the life of Divine Sonship, and thus to bring near to men the beauty and power of the Spirit of God, than this I can imagine no more exalted aim ; and this inward life of the soul, manifesting itself in words and deeds of beneficence, purity, lowliness, and simplicity, is its own exceeding great reward. This is the dominating theme of the Sermon on the Mount.

Such being the nature of the Christian life, a difficult question arises—how are we to create and cultivate it ? A definite law, which told us exactly what we must do and what we must leave undone, we might manage to obey ; but here is

something so vague that no one can take hold of it, and the Sermon on the Mount is exposed to the objection that it is quite unpractical, and ill suited to the needs and possibilities of the present world. The reply to this is, that, though we cannot create it, the Spirit of Life which here finds expression is an inheritance from Christ himself ; that it has never been wholly extinct among those who professed to follow him ; and that it is spread through the response of one susceptible soul to the appeal of another which has been already kindled. It appears from the records in the New Testament that in the earliest age the great instrument by which the new life was spread from land to land was preaching. The evangelists' tones of deep conviction wakened the sleeping echoes in the hearts of others, so that they too heard the heavenly voice within, and began to glow with unexpected and holier emotions. We are able to apprehend, when it is presented to us, that which is higher than anything we have yet attained or conceived ; and thus the mighty Spirit which dictated the words spoken in Galilee has passed on from generation to generation, and become a portion of the world's life.

But now let us suppose that this life has reached us, and we have with joy received it ; is there nothing that we can do to preserve and to cultivate it ? Yes ; our effort is required. We must be obedient to the heavenly vision. There is always danger lest we should be exalted above measure, and so expose ourselves to the humiliation of a fall. We think that our ardour can never cool, and that feeling, with its quick flashes of poetic light, may be a substitute for the dull and prosy routine of duty, till, in our infatuation, we are con-

fronted with the sad reality, that we have foolishly built upon the sand a fabric of character which must fall into ruins when attacked by the floods of temptation. Feeling which is denied its legitimate expression in action only wastes and enfeebles the forces of the soul, and at last dies away into an unprofitable sentimentality. If we would avoid this evil, the will must take hold of the higher feeling, and translate it into deeds. We must remember that, though Christian activity is the spontaneous fruit of the Christian spirit, nevertheless there is a period when we are conscious of the spirit, and yet it is not so powerful as to command the whole character, and shape without our obedient effort the outward course of our lives. Indeed in this world the admonition seldom ceases to be applicable, 'if we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit'; that is, if the interior principle of our life be derived from the Spirit of God, let us give it expression in our conduct.

Now, this obedience, rendered to some spiritual intimation, which is clear enough for truth, but not powerful enough for action, fulfils two important ends.

First, it has a revealing power, enabling us to see more deeply into the meaning and the righteousness of the principle which we have constrained ourselves to obey. Let us take an example. Christ desires us, if our brother has aught against us, to go and be reconciled to him. We have sufficient faith in Christ to believe that this is right, and we have a dim inward perception that it is so. To the natural man it seems very humiliating to acknowledge that we were wrong, and to go and say so to one towards whom we have

harboured bad feelings. Our pride revolts, and invents fine excuses for not following the Christian precept. But when we have choked our pride, and forced ourselves to obey the law of the Spirit, all becomes clear ; we spring into a new elevation of character ; we understand how he that humbleth himself is exalted ; and the spirit of candour and reconciliation stands forth in all the symmetry and simplicity of truth.

Secondly, obedient action has a strengthening power, giving greater firmness and tenacity to the better dispositions. This is only an instance of the general law that practice is the necessary way in which to train any faculty of mind or body. By the practice of virtue the inward resources of virtuous principle become enlarged, until goodness commands the entire inward field, and suppresses without difficulty every antagonistic impulse. The reverse of this is equally true. The constant repression of an evil impulse starves it into feebleness, till at last it is wholly banished from the mind. It is for this reason that Christ not only prescribes certain beneficent acts, but enjoins a severe self-repression : pluck out thine eye ; cut off thy right hand ; take up the cross daily, and follow me. It is thus that the saint's character is formed, not by an instantaneous and overmastering change from the base to the holy, but by long and patient struggle towards the ideal which has been planted in his heart, till the Divine Love within has conquered every foe, and reigns in the beauty of holiness over every affection of the mind.

CHAPTER II

CHRIST AND THE USE OF FORCE

THERE is one passage in the Sermon on the Mount which has given rise to much discussion about its precise intention and the range of its application. I refer to the following words : 'Ye have heard that it was said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth : but I say unto you, Resist not him that is evil : but whosoever smiteth thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also.'¹ The parallel passage in Luke omits the prohibition of resistance, and has only the words, 'To him that smiteth thee on the one cheek offer also the other.'² Some regard this as a precise law for all disciples, forbidding all use of force for the repression of evil ; and among those who so regard it there are some who reluctantly view it as an unwise and impracticable rule. Others, I believe the great majority, think that it is to be understood not in the letter, but in the spirit, or that it was intended to have a temporary and local application.

Let us notice, first, the word 'resist.' This, in itself, contains no suggestion of physical force. Paul resisted Peter to the face when he thought he

¹ Matthew v. 38, 39.

² Luke vi. 29.

was acting insincerely ; but his resistance was confined to a speech.¹ The opponents of Stephen were not able to resist the wisdom and the Spirit by which he spake ;² and this instance is the more conclusive because being unable to 'resist' him, they had recourse to murderous violence. Again, Elymas resisted Barnabas and Saul, 'seeking to turn aside the proconsul from the faith,' presumably by argument, not by knocking them down.³ If, therefore, we are to understand the prohibition strictly, it forbids all opposition, by word as well as deed, to evil. Is it credible that Jesus meant this, when the Sermon on the Mount itself and his whole public career were a resistance to evil ? Certainly the disciples do not appear to have understood it in this sense. The Ephesians are exhorted to 'take up the whole armour of God, that they may be able to resist in the evil day' ;⁴ and Peter and James both admonish us to resist the devil, who is pre-eminently 'the evil one,' or the embodiment of evil.⁵

The reasonable inference from these facts seems to be that 'the evil man,' in the Sermon on the Mount, represents a touchy fellow, who, forgetting himself, strikes an angry blow. This we are advised not to resist even by a verbal remonstrance ; but, when his anger has cooled, and there is some hope that he may view his conduct justly, 'Go,

¹ Galatians ii. 11. In this, and every case where I translate 'resist,' the Greek word is the same.

² Acts vi. 10.

³ Acts xiii. 8. See also Romans ix. 19 ; 11 Timothy iii. 8, iv. 15.

⁴ Ephesians vi. 13.

⁵ 1 Peter v. 9 ; James iv. 7.

shew him his fault between thee and him alone ; if he hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother ' ; and not till you have made every effort to bring about a reconciliation, are you to cast him off.¹ It thus appears that we are dealing, not with criminal assaults, but with quarrels and bitterness that arise among those who ought to be friends. In short, I think Paul, who so often translates Christ's teaching into his own language, gives the true meaning of the passage when he admonishes the Ephesians and Colossians to 'forbear one another in love.'² It is the constant presence of this loving and gracious temper, and not a momentary and literal obedience to a commandment, that exalts men into peacemakers. Here, as elsewhere, 'Love is the fulfilment of the law.'

The foregoing explanation is in accordance with the whole character of the Sermon on the Mount as we have attempted to describe it. But if anyone suppose that it is an attempt to evade a plain commandment, let him consider a startling fact. Jesus refers to the old saying, 'Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy.' This he not only qualifies, but reverses. He commands his disciples, 'Love your enemies,' but does not add that, if they fail to do so, they must forfeit their discipleship.³ But he does say expressly that we cannot be his disciples unless we '*hate* our father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brothers, and sisters.'⁴ Here there is no ambiguity. Instead of the indeterminate personage, 'the evil

¹ Matthew xviii. 15-17.

² Ephesians iv. 2 ; Colossians iii. 13. 'In love' is omitted in Colossians.

³ Matthew v. 43, 44.

⁴ Luke xiv. 26.

man,' whom we are not to resist, or enemies whom we are to love, the people whom we are to hate are distinctly specified. Yet I suppose even the non-resistant would explain this vehement declaration as meaning that, if duty should so require, we must be ready, at its call, to forsake our nearest and dearest. But if we may whittle down one statement by appealing to the free Christian conscience, why may we not, guided by reasonable considerations, limit the application of the other? The case, however, is even stronger than this question implies; for in the one case we entirely reject a statement made in the clearest language, and turn it into something quite different; in the other, according to the explanation which I have given of 'the evil man,' we accept its obligation to the fullest extent, and in no way change its meaning.

We must next observe that, if our interpretation be correct, the passage in question says nothing about the exercise of force on proper occasions. It should further be noticed that Jesus lays down no rule about offering resistance to some one who is attacking, not ourselves, but some one else whom we could help by a timely interference. Can we believe that, if Jesus had seen a child in a furious rage rushing with a knife at another child, he would have thought it wrong to use force in order to prevent the ungoverned anger from achieving its purpose? Where Christ lays down no rule we must judge of his opinion by his general principles, and I know of nothing in his teaching to forbid the exercise of all necessary force in such and similar cases. His ruling principle is love; and love does not require us to acquiesce in crime and outrage, but on the contrary calls upon us, at whatever

cost to ourselves, to defend the helpless against violence and wrong.

If we have thus far proceeded on just lines, there is no ground for alleging that Christ, in effect, prohibits the use of force by the State for the repression of crime, or for self-defence against unjust aggression. But even granting that all exercise of force was forbidden to the individual when acting alone, it would not follow that the State was virtually included. The principles of morality indeed remain the same, and the notion that the State is above the moral law cannot be too strongly repudiated. But the duties which are derived from those principles, or are at least subordinate to them, vary with circumstances. Every profession has its own duties which do not belong to other professions ; and a State, though only a collection of individuals, may, or indeed must, have duties which do not appertain to its separated units. It is, for instance, the duty of the State to collect taxes which are to be used for the common benefit ; but it is the duty of individuals to pay, not to collect them.

And so all use of force might be wrong in solitary individuals, except in extreme cases, and yet in their corporate action through the State it might be their duty to use the necessary force for the maintenance of order and the repression of crime ; and I think it will be generally admitted that there is a wide moral difference between the punishment of crime by an impartial tribunal and executive, and the infliction of the same suffering by a private person following his revengeful instincts. Nevertheless, as I have said, the State does not stand outside the principles of Christian morality. It may not be unjust and aggressive towards its

neighbours, nor cruel and tyrannical towards its own citizens. While acting firmly against wrongdoing, it must be impartial in its judgments, and its severity ought to be tempered with ameliorating mercy. In short, the law of Love is universal; its applications are incalculably varied.

We may now pass to another line of consideration, and seek for some traces of Christ's attitude towards the question before us. Not only is there no pronouncement against the military profession, but Jesus bestows a very high eulogium on a centurion, 'Verily I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel,'¹ and gives him no hint that he would be better still if he left the army. Peter followed this example, and welcomed into the Christian community another centurion, as a man who feared God and worked righteousness, and, while teaching him about the work of Christ, made no suggestion (at least there is none in the record) that his new discipleship required him to lay down the sword.²

It is not necessary to quote particular passages to prove that Jesus, while ascribing to God unbounded forgivingness towards the truly penitent, anticipated for the impenitent sinner a terrible retribution, in outer darkness, where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth, where the worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched. In some of the parables he recognizes the human punishment of the guilty as a matter of course, and says not a word against what must appear to us its barbarous severity. The unforgiving servant is 'delivered to the tormentors.'³ The wicked hus-

¹ Matthew viii. 5-13; Luke vii. 2-10.

² Acts x. 1-48.

³ Matthew xviii. 34.

bandmen are 'miserably destroyed.'¹ The man without a wedding-garment is bound 'hand and foot, and cast into outer darkness.'² The cruel and drunken servant is 'cut asunder,' and appointed his portion with the hypocrites.³ In these cases Christ seems to admit, by implication, the propriety of the punishments.

To this line of argument it may fairly be objected that Jesus, in his parables, naturally takes for granted the usages of his time, and introduces them as illustrations without either approving or condemning them. Thus he refers to slavery without a word of disapproval, though it is now admitted that slavery is inconsistent with genuine Christianity. This is true; but I think the two cases are not strictly parallel. His ideal for men is clearly announced, that they are to become 'sons of God'; and the slave is never introduced to illustrate our highest spiritual relations. But the punishments are referred to as foreshadowing the Divine retribution; and therefore we may suppose that Jesus viewed them as within the Divine order, though he might not have approved of particular modes of their infliction. Further, the absence of express judgment on such matters confirms the impression that Jesus did not aim at social or political revolution, but endeavoured to implant seminal principles of spiritual life which would in time, through their inherent power in men's hearts, bear fruit in the improvement of human institutions. It is thus that slavery has vanished; not through a commandment, but through the leavening opera-

¹ Matthew xxi. 41; Mark xii. 9; Luke xx. 16.

² Matthew xxii. 13.

³ Matthew xxiv. 51; Luke xii. 46.

tion of the Spirit. So, when the same Spirit has completed its work, all violence and war will have come to an end ; but it does not follow that, while multitudes are unconscious of its power, and make selfish passion their highest law, we are to leave the world undefended to the supreme domination of ambition, lust, rapine, and murder. I am quite conscious of imperfect vision ; but it seems to me that to do so would be a cowardly betrayal of the noblest inspirations of Love, and contrary to the Mind of Christ.

We must next attend to a few incidents which seem to indicate that Jesus did not object to self-defence against deliberate and criminal assault. According to all the Gospels one of the disciples (according to Luke, two) carried a sword at the last Passover.¹ I know not why an Apostle carried a sword except to defend the little party against robbers, who infested the road up from Jericho to Jerusalem ; and it is reasonable to suppose that Jesus sanctioned this use of a weapon. That he forbade its use in the garden is no evidence against this supposition ; for there it was used against lawful authority, to which Jesus, like Socrates, would consider himself bound to submit. Besides, such resistance as Peter offered would have been futile, and could only lead to his own destruction. In this sense we may understand the saying, ' All they that take the sword shall perish with the sword '—to kill, in resisting legal authority, is murder, and justly liable to punishment. Shortly before this incident Jesus according to Luke,² deliberately

¹ Matthew xxvi. 51 ; Mark xiv. 47 ; Luke xxii. 38, 49 ; John xviii. 10.

² Luke xxii. 35-38.

altered some of his earlier injunctions, and gave the commandment, 'He that hath none, let him sell his cloak, and buy a sword.' Whatever may be meant by this startling commandment, it does not seem to favour non-resistance. But it may be reasonable to understand it figuratively, and not as an exhortation to bloodshed—henceforward you must expect constant opposition, and must be prepared to act on the defensive. If so, it is one more evidence that Christ's language is not to be interpreted as though it were a legal document.

I am not inclined to attach much importance, in this connexion, to the cleansing of the temple; for there is no evidence that physical force was actually applied to persons. Regarded as a mere display of bodily force, the event seems impossible, and, if possible, very difficult to justify. It was a bold and indignant assertion of prophetic or Messianic authority; and only through the overwhelming moral appeal which Christ's commanding personality made to the bystanders, and indeed to the traders themselves, was it possible for his purpose to be effected. We too may admit and reverence the prophet's authority; but this is not one of the examples which ordinary men can rightfully imitate, and cannot justify a more general exercise of force. The scourge is mentioned only by John, and may perhaps have been used to drive the cattle; or it may have been purely symbolical, as Zedekiah, in ancient times, 'made him horns of iron, and said, Thus saith the Lord, With these shalt thou push the Syrians until they be consumed.'¹

In conclusion, we must refer very briefly to the view of the early Christians. Paul states ex-

¹ I Kings xxii. 11.

plicitly that a ruler ' beareth not the sword in vain : for he is a minister of God, an avenger for wrath to him that doeth evil.'¹ These words seem to declare that a Divine obligation rested on the State to punish crime, even, when necessary, with the sword. In the post-apostolic Church opinion was divided, as it is to-day. Some objected to military service ; not only, however, on pacifist grounds, but as involving idolatry and other evils. The Church, while prohibiting continuance in immoral trades, did not forbid enlistment in the army ; and, whatever credence we may attach to the story, it seems sufficiently proved that Christians served in the army by Tertullian's boast that, in the time of Marcus Aurelius, the army in Germany was saved from perishing of thirst by the prayers of Christian soldiers.²

Perhaps it is now sufficiently clear that it is unwarrantable to assume without discussion, that all use of force by the individual or the State is contrary to Christian teaching and principle, and expressly forbidden by Christ himself. Here too it is well to remember that the letter may kill, and only the Spirit can give life.

¹ Romans xiii. 4. ² *Apologet.* V ; *Ad Scapulam* IV.

CHAPTER III

THE VISION OF GOD

CHRIST'S view of the mode in which the highest spiritual knowledge, the vision of God, may be reached is expressed in the beatitude — 'Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.' What, then, is it to 'see God'? God is invisible; and the fleshly eye can never see him. But there is a spiritual discernment, which stands in the same relation to supersensuous things as our eyesight to material objects. The analogy is very close, and suggests some important truths.

To 'see God' is to know him. But we must distinguish between the knowledge which is derived from the information of another and that which rests upon our own experience. A landscape may be described with such fullness and accuracy that there is some probability of our recognizing it when we visit the scene; and yet a single glance will present a wholly new picture to our minds. The direction of roads and streams, the grouping of mountains and valleys, may have been correctly reported; but to our sight there is an expression, a mysterious beauty, or a proud sublimity, which words cannot convey. Similarly, we see God when his wisdom, love, and holiness stand revealed to us in their

essential nature, and we know, not by the information of another, but by our own internal perceptions, what his Spirit is, and when he has become to us a real Presence in our lives, whose love fills us with love, whose mercy is felt resting upon us in every trial, whose holiness dwells within our conscience, and whose wisdom shines in cloud and tree and grass, and turns the dull sod into a temple where Divine power sits enshrined. We must, indeed, be grateful for every prophet who tells us truly what he sees ; for through his words we are enabled to believe when our hearts fail, and our only prayer is, ' Lord, have mercy, and take not thy Holy Spirit from us.' But oh ! we too would see, and feel forsaken nevermore. We would gaze into the still depths of the Divine Spirit, and over all the troublous movements of mortal life, over sin, and sorrow, and death, behold infinite Love ruling. And though imperfection must blot our vision here, we would look forward to the time when we shall no longer ' see through a glass darkly,' but commune with him face to face, and know even as also we are known.

But is it possible for the finite thus to know, to see, the Infinite ? Is not God so transcendently exalted above the highest created mind that, when we turn our eyes towards him, we can see only mystery, and must confess that his thoughts are not as our thoughts ? In a certain sense this is true ; but we must not allow humility to lead us into scepticism. Goodness, love, wisdom are unchangeable in their nature, and, admitting only varieties of degree, remain essentially the same in all spirits. It is humility's devoutest language to own that our wisdom and goodness are beams

from the eternal Light ; and, so far as we possess them, we have a real knowledge of those attributes in God. Light is still light, though it may only glimmer from a candle or a glow-worm. That God is Love, and that we have seen that Love, we may be absolutely assured ; but that we have *measured* it we dare not pretend. Our vision may be indistinct and confused ; yet it is vision still. When stars spangle the sky, we do not doubt whether we see them because we cannot discern what life is moving on their distant surface. So we see God's Love, whether it trembles into our souls like the light of a star, or rises in splendour as the sun, or, like the nearer earth, reveals its separate wonders and its care for individual life, while it conceals its vast extent. And when we lose ourselves in adoration of those perfections which no thought can exhaust, and confess that such knowledge is higher than we can attain to, we must not forget that our adoration is sustained only by our vision ; and if, when we raised our eyes to God, we saw only a desolate space, aspiration would cease to soar, and worship would die.

This leads us to remark that seeing implies belief. Our spiritual, like our sensuous, perceptions, rest upon their own authority, and have the same right to an unquestioning trust. The man who sees God cannot doubt his existence. That conviction too is spontaneous and irresistible. Nay, even God may be felt as the one unchanging certainty, while the solid earth becomes shadowy and unsubstantial ; and we may learn to regard the senses as deceptive, while the Spirit reveals to us eternal truths. Let us ask, then, on what this spiritual perception depends.

The great Teacher lays down a principle which men would do well to study and apply. Clearness of spiritual sight depends on purity of heart. We hear little of this principle in the wars of the sects. Some appeal to authority, whether of Church or Bible; and others, discarding authority, are convinced that the intellect is the only instrument of religious progress. All these have their legitimate place in the shaping of our thought; but Christ and his Apostles insist on a far deeper principle. 'Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.' 'Blessed are the pure in heart; for they shall see God.' 'Blessed are the peacemakers; for they shall be called the children of God.' 'If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine.' 'The things of God knoweth none but the Spirit of God.' 'Every one that loveth is born of God and knoweth God. He that loveth not knoweth not God.' According to this teaching our knowledge of God depends, not on Church or Bible or intellect, but on our lowliness, purity, and love. If we would know God, we must cleanse our hearts, and put away our low desires, our worldly aims, our pride, our malice, our contempt. Not by paying a seeming deference to the distant words of Christ, but by putting on the Lord Jesus, by being clothed in his spirit, shall we learn his truth. There is no other royal road to truth's eternal kingdom. God will not dwell in a defiled temple. His Spirit will not mingle with the crowd of foul claimants whom we harbour in our souls. This, then, is the message of Christianity to all who seek after God:—Search your ways, and consider whether your heart be pure, and 'walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an

offering and a sacrifice to God.' The cross alone can raise us to God. Live for self, and let the impure images of earth haunt your imagination, and God will be hidden from your eyes. Deny yourself, surrender self with an absolute trust to God, and let your only abiding desire be to do his will, and the fullness of Divine knowledge will stream in upon your soul, and you will know, as words can never convey to you, the depth of truth in that ancient beatitude—'Blessed are the pure in heart ; for they shall see God.'

CHAPTER IV

THE CHURCH MILITANT

CHRIST made use of a striking metaphor to describe his conception of what, in more modern phrase, we may call the Church militant. Addressing his disciples, he said, 'Ye are the salt of the earth : but if the salt have lost its savour, wherewith shall it be salted ? It is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out and trodden under foot of men.' In these words Jesus set before his disciples the great duty which devolved upon them of purifying society, and the terrible decree of worthlessness which hangs over those who suffer their spiritual energy to melt away and become inoperative. The so-called salt in Palestine was of a mixed kind, and often the genuine salt was dissolved by the moisture in the store-houses, leaving behind an insipid residuum, which was thrown away as possessing no further value since it could not recover its original flavour. Thus, if the saving forces of society sink into apathy and sloth, no power remains that can give them a new vitality, and prevent their being trodden down under the merited scorn of mankind.

Christianity, then, has been from the first, through the deliberate intention of its founder, a

missionary and aggressive religion. It came, not to bring peace, but a sword. It did not steal timidly from the calm seclusion of a hermit's cell, and ask its votaries to leave the world and its contaminations ; nor did it wrap itself in the silent contemplation of the dreamy mystic—although it too had a heavenly peace and a holy vision of God. But it sprang into the world with the blast of a trumpet and a call to battle, and its cry soon rang from end to end of the empire of Rome. But the weapons of its warfare were spiritual, not carnal. Its preachers could die, but they did not kill. They conquered their enemies by love ; they gave life to society by their blood. Nevertheless, Christ administers the most withering rebuke to the making of proselytes—‘ woe unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites ! For ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte, and when he is made, ye make him twofold more the child of hell than yourselves.’ There is, then, a kind of missionary enterprise which Christ most emphatically condemns as productive of the worst results of pharisaism, self-righteousness, spiritual pride, contempt towards those who are not of the same party, a smothering of the inner spirit of religion under devotion to its forms and methods. Hence it is necessary to consider the direction and plan of the Christian movement.

The attack of Christianity was directed, not against uncertain opinions about speculative points of theology, but against the moral and spiritual evil in men's hearts and lives ; and its object was not to gather into a party people of the same intellectual colour, but to bring men to God, to cleanse them from sin, and create in them a Divine

ideal of holiness, love, and duty, to be evermore realized with growing perfection in a redeemed and purified society. At the time when this appeal first went forth the world had reached its highest stage of civilization, and was proud of its progress in the arts and sciences, and in all the conveniences and refinements of life. Grand sentiments were uttered with aristocratic grace in luxurious mansions, and the rhetorician's praise of virtue received its mead of applause. But one deep-souled man saw the moral decay at the heart of this civilization, and at the beginning of a letter which he addressed to the vanguard of the Christian host at Rome he has given an appalling account of the condition of society as it presented itself to the eye of one who had been touched by the Spirit of Christ. It was his object to describe the sinful state of the world, and therefore he was not called upon to exhibit the other side, and we need not suppose that he saw no bright spots to relieve the darkness of the picture. But his charges are in the main abundantly confirmed by historians and satirists; and while we listen to the magnificent phrases of the courtly Seneca, we hear also the groan of the dying gladiator, or the broken hymn of some poor Christian perishing under the claws of the lion, while the fashion and pride as well as the rabble of Rome gaze with brutal joy; and, if here and there we see survivals from the simple virtue of an older time, we witness in many a marble hall an immorality too loathsome to speak of, and a gluttony fit only for swine. Truly that ancient civilization needed some salt to season it.

Such, then, is the corruption, not unknown to our own day, which Christianity undertakes to

purify ; such are the evils which rush thick upon our minds when we speak of missionary enterprise. But how does the Church militant attack these enemies ? From first to last, wherever it has gained a victory, it has been by the power of personal devotion. It was the majesty and force of the Divine Spirit in Christ, glorious under its crown of thorns and conquering in the midst of death, that trained and disciplined the great army of martyrs, and drove the philanthropist to seek the noisome dungeon, and broke the fetters of the slave, and sent the tender grace of woman to mitigate with nursing hand the cruelties of war or to explore and sweeten the slums of our cities. It is through souls thus consecrated, souls which have themselves caught the heavenly flame that burned in the heart of Christ, that the effective appeal of a higher spiritual life must always come. 'Ye are the salt of the earth': Jesus does not say this doctrine or that, but you men and women, with your lowliness of mind, your thirst for goodness, your gentleness and mercy, your purity of heart, your loving skill in making peace, your readiness to suffer for the sake of righteousness. Through you the Divine Pity must make its appeal; through you it must seek and save the lost.

Through what channels, then, is the higher influence to flow ? First and foremost we must place, apart from all particular agencies, the life of the righteous man. A man who, whatever may be his occupation, places before himself a high ideal of duty, and seeks the attainment of that ideal with the help and guidance of the Spirit of God, cleanses society by his mere presence wherever he goes. Trickery and meanness shrink

from the verdict of his clear, strong conscience ; and trembling virtue leaps up and takes heart again. A man who has risen superior to vanity and ambition, who has trampled selfishness under his feet, and gives himself with steadfast and consecrated will to the work which he believes Providence has assigned to him, may move a whole nation with enthusiasm, and compel it to acknowledge the nobility of lofty and disinterested goodness. This, then, is our first obligation if we would be healers of the world's sin and wretchedness, simply to allow the heavenly light and life to flood our own souls, and let it flow thence whither it will, a potent witness of deeper things in man than the love of pleasure and display.

But this does not exhaust the Christian's duty. He will avail himself of opportunities of strengthening by his direct influence the better choice, and of dissuading from evil courses ; and he will give his countenance and support to agencies which have been found the most efficacious in waging an open war against sin, and advancing by public effort the kingdom of God. Among these the congregation and school, with all the institutions that naturally cluster around them, take the foremost place. However we may sometimes satirize the weakness of the pulpit or laugh at the pedantry of the teacher, we cannot but feel that the closing of all the churches and schools in the country would be a national disaster of the first magnitude ; and I believe that even the vast multitudes who, to our shame, never enter a place of worship, are not wholly uninfluenced by the testimony which is borne to higher things by the returning Sunday and its solemn assemblies.

But why is it that we find so much decrepitude in these venerable institutions? Is it not because we have come too much to regard them as ends in themselves, and suppose that all is well if the ancient forms are decently gone through; and we forget that they are only machines which afford opportunity for the exercise of spiritual force, and, unless they be all aglow with Divine energy, they cannot kindle the soul or melt the obdurate heart. They never can be a substitute for personal power; and this personal power, which, like some impalpable essence, ought to pervade all our agencies, does not depend only on the minister, or only on those who actively co-operate with him, but on the tone and vigour of the entire church. A church which lives will draw men to itself; 'but if the salt has lost its savour, wherewith shall it be salted?'

While the Church thus makes its appeal mainly through the persuasiveness of elevated character, we must not forget that at the basis of Christian character, and contained implicitly in all its manifestations, there are certain principles of conduct and spiritual truths, which may be thrown into an intellectual form, and pressed as doctrines on the attention of our fellow men. There can be no doubt that human life has been exposed to heart-rending evils from the action of false principles and erroneous conceptions. It is sufficient to refer to the well-known horrors which sprang from the belief in witchcraft, and the fiendish tortures of the Inquisition. The principles of which the latter were the natural fruit are still professed by a large part of Christendom; and if they seem comparatively inactive, it is

because they are held in check by the material force of the opposition. The exclusiveness and bigotry, which we can now smile at as petty since their hands are tied, may once more become formidable if we sleep at our posts. If the conflict against them finds no better champions than indifference and unbelief, they will yet reassert their power ; for religion is too deeply rooted in the mind to be destroyed, and men will ultimately choose it, even in its most perverted form, rather than linger with starving souls in the desert of a godless world. The false principles and errors which have so long been consecrated by the holy name of religion can be vanquished only through the influence of a lofty and inspiring faith, in which men will recognize a purer and completer image of that truth which they have seen, dim and tarnished, through the fogs of ignorance and passion. To find an intellectual expression for this faith, which shall be on a level with the highest knowledge that the human mind has reached, is a permanent duty of the Church ; and I cannot but think that a large part of the scepticism of the present day is due to the Church's failure in this respect. Theology has either presented a look of blank and stolid antagonism or been dragged at the wheels of science, instead of leading the vanguard of knowledge, and singing songs of triumph as our great army of investigators drew forth the secrets of nature, and unfolded to our view a universe of unimagined magnificence. But even in our endeavour to give men a theology worthy of the knowledge of our time, and of the new sentiments of worship and of awe which must fill the soul as we stand amid the glories of that

temple which science has revealed, we must still remember that our work is religious, and can be accomplished only by personal power. It is not the intellectual form, but only the living truth animating the intellectual form, which can make men free; and we know that, when this living truth has been withdrawn, theology has often lain with chill and stifling weight upon the heart, and made it a slave. 'I am the Truth,' said Christ; it is not so much in what I say as in what I am, not in the form of utterance adapted to present thought, but in the eternal Spirit whose meaning I interpret. And so it must be now. Only a theology which comes from a deep life in the soul can ever reach the soul. When we see some poor and vapid creature flinging about his pretentious phrases, and saying smart things about subjects that are infinitely beyond the measure of his plummet-line, we do not care to hear him. But when we behold a strong, serene man, with a character of heavenly beauty, who evidently shapes his course by far other than the world's measures of bliss, we would learn the secret of his power, and catch words of truth dropping from his lips. From him theology comes charged with spiritual force; and even if we are compelled to dissent from many of his opinions, still truth passes as an inspiration from him to us, and dwells in us with a new vital glow.

It is apparent, then, that even in our endeavour to demolish error and to spread a higher truth, our missionary enterprise must rise above mere doctrinal propagandism. We must of course speak what we personally believe; but we should only repeat the old error if we attempted to tie men up

in the forms of our own thought, instead of inviting them to expatiate for themselves in the wide fields of Divine truth. We wish to emancipate the intellect, to bring home to the conscience its individual responsibility, and to lift the soul into communion with God far above the noisy controversies of earth and the vexing watchwords of parties. To lead men to the vision of God, where they shall no longer hear of him only with the hearing of the ear, but shall see his love for themselves, and feel it as a mighty power melting down their evil passions, and filling them with the spirit of sonship—this, and not to enlarge a sect or to glorify a theological creed, must be the aim of our warfare. If we are true to this high calling, we may yet see a great army of the children of God, not indeed assembled under one banner or gathered into one overshadowing Church, but conscious of the same Divine relationship, feeling the generous throb of brotherhood in their breasts, and marching by their several paths to the same eternal life.

CHAPTER V

GOD AND MAMMON

THE ideas underlying the words good and evil are more or less clearly present in the minds of all men ; for two contrasted sets of facts are always with us, and force themselves on the attention of the least reflective. On the one hand we see righteousness, health, and prosperity, and these we call good ; on the other hand we observe wickedness, disease, pain, and penury, and these we characterize as evil. But as the mind advances, it becomes conscious of a distinction running through both of these realms. Moral good and evil are essentially different from physical good and evil ; and so wide is this difference that some thinkers would limit the terms to the moral sphere, and deny that pain is an evil at all. The general sense of mankind, however, is unable to accept this conclusion, and the Stoics themselves, who in the ancient world were the great upholders of this exalted doctrine, advocated suicide as a means of escape from intolerable suffering. Whatever beneficent purpose we may discover in pain as a needed discipline of character, there is a vast amount of suffering which we are unable to explain, and which can have no place in our imagina-

tion of an ideal future. With the disappearance of sin we cannot but dream that pain too will cease, that God will wipe away all tears from our eyes, and sorrow and sighing will flee away.

These two realms possess such contradictory attributes that, in the endeavour to explain them, religious thinkers have constructed various systems of dualism. Some have thought that there were two eternal principles, a good and an evil, engaged in perpetual conflict, the superiority of force, however, being slightly on the side of good, which was ultimately to triumph. Others have supposed that there was an eternal matter out of which the universe was constructed, and which, if not actively evil, was at least incapable of receiving the perfect Divine impress, and that thus the Divine goodness was limited by the intractable nature of the material on which it had to work. Judaism, followed by Christianity, was so thoroughly monotheistic that, if we make a partial exception of a few thinkers, it traced everything to God as the sole ultimate cause. Nevertheless, it did not overlook obvious facts, or seek to confound good and evil in a pantheistic optimism. It recognized the world's alienation from God as a dark reality, and thought there was something undivine connected with disease and pain. It thus gave rise to a problem which has never been fully solved ; and though the evidences of the Divine goodness in the world are sufficient to confirm our faith, there is abundance of mystery left for the exercise of our trust.

The doctrine of Satan, in which so many have found refuge as introducing a kind of dualism, only pushes back the difficulty ; for Satan himself

has always been regarded as a fallen spirit, ruined by his own free choice, and completely at the disposal of Divine omnipotence. This doctrine is indeed recognized in the recorded teaching of Christ ; but it is alluded to so very seldom that we may fairly take it as a reflection of popular opinion rather than as an expression of his own deliberate belief, and it is certainly remarkable that in St. Paul's elaborate exposition of the doctrine of sin there is no allusion whatever to Satanic agency. In the Sermon on the Mount Christ contrasts, not God and Satan, but God and mammon. Mammon is a word signifying 'riches,' so that we have here an instance simply of figurative personification ; and we may fairly infer that Jesus did not regard Satan as a great personal ruler of the kingdom of evil, capable of contending with God for the possession of the world. The dualism is really transferred from the government of the universe to the heart of man ; for riches in themselves are neither good nor evil, but all depends on the character of our affection for them, and the use which we make of them.

The kingdom of mammon is selected by Christ to place in emphatic contrast with the kingdom of God, probably because the love of gain becomes most like idolatry, and the pursuit of wealth necessarily occupies more time, and, when we yield to its fascination, is more absorbing than the gratification of any other passion. Our other passions arise upon occasion, and spend themselves ; but this may grow continually deeper and stronger till life ends, and the empty and barren soul passes into the eternal world, and is remembered only as the possessor of so many pounds sterling, not one

of which it can carry away to cover its spiritual nakedness. And again, the love of gain gives rise to the most widespread social evils, trickery, fraud, oppression, slavery, war, and, not least, an utterly false standard of judgment in the intercourse between man and man.

How many can honestly say that the simple presence of a human soul is infinitely more to them than all the pomp and grandeur that wealth can purchase, and that the measure of their courtesy is in no degree regulated by the abundance of possessions? So ingrained in men's ordinary thought is the supreme value of riches that we are constantly told that we must educate our people lest we should lose our commercial supremacy: in other words, the spiritual exists for the sake of the material, and we must pay a little outward respect to the laws of God, lest the great idol mammon should be dethroned, and his temple left empty of worshippers. This false and degraded sentiment is the besetting sin of a great commercial people, and our social and political ideals are seldom free from its poison. It was so in the ancient world, as it is now; and it is no wonder that he who came in poverty to enrich the world with spiritual wealth set the kingdom of mammon over against the kingdom of God, as that which most generally divided men's allegiance, and drew their minds away from the spiritual ends of their being.

If, however, we regard the subject more generally we may say that the kingdom of evil is that in which attention is confined to the lower part of human nature, and self-interest is the one inspiring motive, checked in its exercise only by its own conflicting claims. The momentary impulse of selfish-

ness may be sacrificed in view of larger considerations ; but if these considerations be themselves selfish, there is nothing in the sacrifice to win our moral approval. On the contrary, deliberate and far-seeing calculations are a truer expression of character than sudden and transient outbursts, which often are quite opposed to the settled purpose of our lives ; and the cold villainy of a man who schemes for his own interest, regardless of the sufferings which he may bring upon his neighbours, and who wears a strict demeanour as part of his plan of self-advancement, is far more odious than the hot petulance of one whose passions have not yet been brought under the control of principle. Nor is this worship of false and vulgar ideals less evil when it is transferred from individuals to nations. It has often been observed that corporate life is less under the restraint of conscience than that of individuals, and many a man will sanction as one of a multitude what he would scorn to do in his private capacity.

How many of us entertain an ideal for our nation which we would disdain to cherish for ourselves. We retain in our international relations a sanguinary code of honour which in civil life we have banished to the ring of the prize-fighter, and we estimate our greatness as a people by the abundance of the things that we possess, caring as little as heathen Rome for the means by which we have acquired them. When John Wesley wished to preach the doctrines of Christianity to an Indian chief, the latter replied, ' Why, these are Christians at Savannah ! These are Christians at Frederica ! ' ' Christian much drunk ! Christian beat men ! Christian tell lies ! Devil Christian ! Me no Christ-

ian !'¹ Men of this stamp, through whom the name of Christ is blasphemed among the heathen, shriek against all attempts to uphold national righteousness as maudlin cant and sentimental hypocrisy, and perhaps succeed in terrifying some timid souls, and dragging them down to their low level. It requires some firmness of purpose to retain unshaken our faith in Christ, and to keep fast hold of a practical conviction that the real greatness of a nation depends on the service of God, and not on that of mammon, and that it is only through justice, generosity, and disinterestedness that we are truly exalted, and that wealth of intellect and soul is infinitely better than extent of territory and piles of gold.

In contrast with the kingdom of evil is the kingdom of God, in which that which is highest in our nature receives the first attention, and devotion to the will of God is the dominant motive. This is a kingdom which, as a rule, we cannot enter except through much tribulation, and it requires the clear vision of faith, and the strong ties of love, to keep us constant to it. The tribulation may be outward and manifest, and, like our Master, we may have to bear a cross which others can see, and which the flesh can feel. Or the trial may be inward and moral, a wrestling with temptation known only to ourselves, sacrifices to principle which we hide as far as we can even from our own thoughts, pangs of self-love which tear us fiercely before they are succeeded by a blessed sense of victory and healing. We have not now to go to prison or to death for our faith ; but we may have to stand alone, while we long for sympathy and fellowship, and a laugh or

¹ Southey's *Life of Wesley*, I, p. 94.

a sneer may daunt us though we could stand firm against an attack that more obviously demanded our courage. We must be ready for whatever may befall ; and our Father who seeth in secret will reward us by giving us those things which we most deeply prize, a nearer communion with himself, a knowledge of his will sufficient for our guidance here, and a pure and trustful heart.

It would seem as though these two kingdoms were so utterly opposed to one another that no one could attempt to serve in both, and that Christ's words therefore contained a needless warning. But in fact it is not so ; for the division is in our thought rather than in our surroundings. It would not, I fancy, be unjust to say that most men endeavour to establish a sort of working compromise between these two kingdoms, or, to use a common phrase, try to make the best of both worlds. Duty and self-interest so frequently coincide that it is not apparent at first sight why we cannot serve both. May we not divide the field of our activity between them, and, while we allow self-interest to be our daily prompter and guide, hold duty in reserve to act as a check, and prevent us from going very far astray ? By following this rule we might keep the Ten Commandments, and maintain our position in respectable society, and still fix our hearts on our accumulating possessions. But this apparent reconciliation is only temporary. We cannot serve two masters. Occasions arise when one or the other must give way. We can perhaps make large gains by some trifling act of dishonour, by some clever little trick of concealment, for which no one will be able to reproach us : what shall we do ?

Romantic folly, exclaims the world, to refuse what fortune has placed in your way ! 'What shall it profit a man,' says Christ, 'if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his soul ?' In such a case God and mammon stand in opposition, and we cannot serve both. He will prevail to whom we have habitually given our hearts. Has it been our aim to reach a position of wealth and grandeur ? Then the little cloud of dishonour will be accepted, though we may shiver for a moment in its shadow. Has it been our aim to do our work perfectly, and to use as a holy trust whatever returns God might grant to our industry ? Then without an effort we cry, get thee behind me, Satan, and trample the serpent of temptation under our feet. In the days of Bonaparte a London firm obtained, through the activity of one of its members, news of the battle of Leipzig a day sooner than the Government. By dealing extensively in stocks they could have made an enormous fortune ; that is, by taking advantage of the public ignorance, they could, without rendering any equivalent, have transferred a quantity of other people's money to their own coffers. The question was considered, and it was decided that such a transaction would be unworthy of British merchants. These were men who would not sacrifice the most delicate honour to the lust of wealth, and proved that in the very temple where it is generally supposed that mammon may be legitimately worshipped, the golden image crumbles into dust before the simple faith of high principle ; and the awful image of God takes its place, and a voice is heard, 'Well done, good and faithful servant.'

Such a crisis may come sooner or later to all of

us, varying indeed in character according to our position in the world, but equally showing whither the settled purpose of our life is tending. There may be a period of vacillation, when we cannot perfectly trust the God whom we fain would serve, when we cast longing eyes towards mammon, but cannot yet demean ourselves to be his slaves. We would follow the enticing lead of mammon, and yet own the restraining hand of God. But this divided state of mind cannot last. The worldly heart slowly learns to despise the pricks of conscience which interfere with its success ; and when some great temptation comes, it falls an easy prey, and is not even startled by the sudden revelation of its own meanness. But he who loves God possesses his soul in peace, and moves among the things of the world as their master, not their slave ; and when the hour of trial comes, his mind never wavers, for his treasure is within, and he counts not the outward gifts of God to be his own. The heartburnings and estrangements which the love of money so often causes between friends, and even those of the same family, cannot touch him, for he would rather be poor than violate the law of love, and out of poverty he can build a spacious palace for the soul.

Yet he is not indifferent to the advantages of wealth. He may be an able man of business ; and, if he be engaged in business, he will do his best, by all righteous means, to make it prosper. But he will care more for the honour and excellence of his work than for his personal reward, and if riches flow in upon him, he will use them as a steward of God, following the dictates of wisdom and love. If 'it is more blessed to give than to receive,' it

is blessed also to receive the fruits of honest labour, that one may not only be no burden to others, but may have something to give to a brother in need, and be able to do some little towards lightening the weight of the world's woe. Our gaining and our spending may be alike beneficent; and only beneficence is from God, and makes us godlike. This is the only treasure that endures; for the dreams of ambition and self-display are bounded by death, and if they are long in the prospect, they are short in the retrospect. The shouts of purchased adulation serve but to drown the notes of our funeral bell, and cannot put off the inevitable hour. But he who lives in simplicity and godly sincerity hears the solemn requiem blended with glad thanksgiving upon the farther shore, and knows that when he crosses 'the silent river' he will bear his treasure with him. 'For the world passes away, and the lust thereof; but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.'

CHAPTER VI

COVETOUSNESS

THE vice of covetousness may be fitly considered in connexion with that of mammon-worship, to which it is closely related.

It is recorded that Jesus was once accosted by a disappointed man in the crowd who were listening to him, and requested to intervene in a disputed question of inheritance. Jesus rejected the proposal, evidently with some indignation: 'Man, who made me a judge or a divider over you?' Instead of sympathizing with this aggrieved person he took occasion to warn his hearers against covetousness, the evil passion which was the source of the family feud. 'Take heed,' he said, 'and keep yourselves from all covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things that he possesseth.' The lesson has not ceased to be necessary. I believe that covetousness is one of the besetting sins of the present time, and that it has even reached such a pitch as to constitute a national danger; and in such a time it is well that we should all look into our hearts, and see that our desires and aims rest upon right principles. There are few passions which are more insidious in their advance; and it is not impossible that

some who are now moved by the open generosity of youth may gradually yield to the 'contagion of the world's slow stain,' and become hard and grasping men. It would be well for every one to settle beforehand in his own mind what rules he ought to follow in the acquisition and use of wealth. Some who have expected large fortunes have guarded themselves by committing such rules to writing, and solemnly dedicating themselves to their observance; and it is pleasant to think that among the rich men of England there have been many who have been numbered with the noblest and least worldly of our race.

And now let us endeavour to make clear to ourselves what is meant by covetousness. It is important for the guidance of real life that we should not set up impracticable standards. The simple desire for and satisfaction in wealth, at least so far as to enable one to share in the innocent enjoyments and conveniences of life, cannot be stigmatized as covetousness, so long as they do not interfere with the action of higher motives; and indeed it is the duty of one who has others dependent on him to do what he honourably can to provide for their maintenance and comfort. It will be remembered that an Apostle gives this principle a wide extension. We are all members one of another, and he exhorts men, instead of stealing, to labour, working with their hands that which is good, that they may have something to give to him who is in need.¹ Covetousness, then, is an inordinate and selfish desire for gain, one so strong as to deaden or overpower higher principles of

¹ Eph. iv. 28.

conduct, and it is applied especially to the desire of gaining what belongs to others without rendering an equivalent. This lies at the root not only of theft, but of all the methods by which men try to overreach one another, and to appropriate more than their just share of the world's wealth.

What, then, is the proper Christian attitude towards riches? When we consider them simply in themselves, is wealth morally degrading, is poverty morally sublime? There has been a tendency among moralists, in ages of great material prosperity and luxury, to inveigh against wealth as deadening man's higher faculties and lowering his ideals, and to extol poverty as the royal way to the finest spirituality and the most commanding virtues. This view, which professedly rests upon a wide experience, is by no means limited to Christian teachers; but it found one of its most marked expressions in mediaeval Christianity, when those who wished to be perfect voluntarily embraced poverty, and almost worshipped it as a goddess, who had in her keeping the secret of eternal life.

In modern times there is a strong reaction against the admiration of poverty. This is due in part to a serious study of social problems, and a careful observation of the influence of circumstances upon character, but partly also, I cannot but think, to a weak charity and a false philosophy, which overlook or deny the hard and solemn fact of human responsibility. Thus we are frequently told that vice and crime are due to the miserable houses in which people live, and that it is useless to preach the gospel to hungry men. Yet it was to the poor and the vicious that the gospel origin-

ally appealed. It was to such that the Methodist preaching was addressed ; and one of Wesley's perplexities arose from the fact that those who were converted were thereby lifted out of their poverty, and with increasing comfort their zeal waxed cold. And it is from the same class that, in the present day, the great Salvation Army, which has spread its peaceful empire round the world, draws its recruits. Though in individual cases much allowance must be made for the effect of circumstances, and though many are poor through no fault of their own, nevertheless I believe that in a large view, looking at men in the mass, poverty is due to sin much more than sin to poverty.

To attain a just view we must probably seek a path intermediate between these extreme positions. If the worship of poverty, instead of being a counsel of perfection for a few, were to become universal, we should simply relapse into barbarism. Civilization rests ultimately on a material basis. The sharpest stimulus in the development of mental and moral force has been the necessity for supplying the demands of the body. Even a hermit must have food, clothing, and shelter ; and to provide these in any decent fashion for a great community must have called forth a vast amount of invention, industry, and skill. Thus man was started on his upward course ; but until there was a large accumulation of wealth the higher intellectual faculties could not be set free from merely utilitarian ends. The great advance in knowledge, the creation of literature, the expression of religion in the various forms of art, in a word, all those spiritual efforts which do not contribute immediately to man's material well-being, would have been impossible

where riches did not abound, but men were compelled to apply the whole of their energy to procure a bare subsistence.

Of course I do not mean that the highest mental gifts have been exercised only by members of the wealthy class, but only that such gifts would have no scope in an impoverished society. Universities, libraries, laboratories, observatories, the delicate and beautiful instruments which are revealing to us the secrets of the universe, are costly things; and the sublime cathedrals, where the religious aspirations of centuries seem gathered together into one glorious manifestation, exhibit also the resources of communities which had produced far more than the bare necessities of life. It appears then, that wealth, considered simply in itself and as subserving the purposes of an organized community, is a good thing, for which we ought to be grateful, and towards the production of which every capable man ought to make some contribution. And yet, on the other hand, it cannot be denied that the love of wealth for its own sake, or for the sake of selfish gratification, is one of the meanest of the passions, and is proved by experience to be destructive of the finest elements of character, and to bring about a slow national decay. How far does this view harmonize with our Christian profession?

There is, I think, a widespread belief, secretly felt even by many who professedly revere Christ's teaching, that his declarations on this subject are inconsistent, not only with modern practice, but with the principles which political economy has established, and which the modern conscience approves. Now, there are undoubtedly some

strong sayings among the recorded utterances of Christ, which seem to glorify poverty, and to forbid the accumulation of wealth. Such passages ought by no means to be neglected or explained away ; but they must partly be balanced by the general tenor of his teaching, and partly be interpreted by their relation to the thought of the time. When it was believed that worldly prosperity was a proof of virtue, and suffering an evidence of guilt, he taught that the positions of the comfortable man, who had been nursed in the lap of luxury, and of the poor man who lay wounded and helpless at his gate, might be reversed in the world to come. But it is obvious from this very parable, as well as from the compassion towards the poor and afflicted which runs through all his teaching and activity, that he looked upon poverty in itself as an evil, the misfortune of which must be redressed in the kingdom of God.

Nowhere does he set up poverty as an end in itself ; nowhere does he practise or inculcate ostentatious acts of self-renunciation. Indeed he expressly condemns this whole method of gaining a reputation for sanctity by the exhibition of outward austerities. He was engaged in an enterprise which demanded the severest self-denial on the part of himself and his immediate followers ; and for this reason he calls upon the rich man who wanted to be perfect to renounce his wealth, and join the obscure band of poor men who were going to reform the world, but he never represents this as a universal obligation. In the narrative which has suggested the present discussion he has not a word of blame for the rich man who kept the whole of the inheritance, nor does he tell the poor

complainant that his poverty would be counted to his credit ; but he rebukes his covetousness, and then adds a parable to show what an uncertain benefit the wealth of an individual actually is.

In the Sermon on the Mount he charges his disciples not to lay up for themselves treasures upon earth, but to lay up spiritual treasure, which is beyond the assaults of material ill, thus, for the sake of emphasis, placing in strong contrast two ideals of life, and indicating the end towards which human endeavour should be directed. He sums up this part of his teaching in the clear and unadorned words, 'Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you' ; and there is no prescription that these additional things should be thanklessly or carelessly cast away. Here, I believe, we have the everlasting principle, which contains nothing fanatical, and which no modern knowledge can ever set aside. It is not even a picture of remote and ideal perfection which we can never hope to realize. It lies distinctly within the reach of every man, and ought to be taken seriously to heart by those who are at the opening of their self-directed life, and have to choose between the ways which lead to mammon and to God. The rule, in modern language, is simply this, that the end and aim of life is spiritual, and that material wealth must always be acquired and used in strict subordination to this, and that, if in fulfilment of our duty wealth comes to us, it is to be used as a trust, under a solemn sense of responsibility to God. This is a universal law for individuals and for nations. So long as it is obeyed, wealth cannot be too abundant ; but if the law be broken, and

the relative position of these two treasures be reversed, then the soul has been bartered for gain, corruption has set in, and, though judgment may be long delayed, the whole rotten mass will at last tumble to ruins before some stronger and nobler power.

And now let us look at some of the ways in which the Christian rule is violated ; for, as I have already said, covetousness is one of the besetting sins of the present time. Vast accumulations of material treasure have been made, and as men's moral and spiritual stature has not risen proportionately their hearts are set on that which alone they feel to be treasure. As this wealth possesses enormous power in the affairs of the world, and is most unequally distributed, the cupidity of the less fortunate is excited, and so the evil passion intrudes into every class of society.

We may survey this covetousness first in its larger aspects.¹ It seems to have a very wide influence upon national policy. Mere bigness of empire, mere selfish interest, are openly extolled as the proper aims of government, and the old ideals of human right and justice, at which the hearts of men used to bound some half century ago, are now trailed in the dust, and sneered at as the cant of sentimentalists. There is a class of half-human beings who think it a fine thing that they are without the sentiments which alone are worthy of a man, and who, for their own ends, make it their business to appeal to the basest and most vulgar passions. I may quote here the strong words of

¹ The following passage was written before the war. I trust the eyes of many have been opened by its revolting horrors ; but the danger is still before us.

Coleridge : 'Try to conceive a man without the ideas of God, eternity, freedom, will, absolute truth, of the good, the true, the beautiful, the infinite. An animal endowed with a memory of appearances and of facts might remain. But the man will have vanished ; and you have instead a creature, *more subtle than any beast of the field*, but likewise *cursed above every beast of the field ; upon the belly must it go and dust must it eat all the days of its life.*'¹ Men of this stamp, whose one concern is to get rich, succeed in becoming masters of an enormous capital, through which they bend to their purposes multitudes who have not the penetration or the strength or courage or virtue to defy them.

Capital concentrated in the hands of companies which care for nothing but their own pelf, and employ a portion of their resources in corrupting the press, and propagating false and degrading ideals, has become a serious menace to the peace and happiness of the world. I know not how this evil influence is to be counteracted except by appealing to the higher enthusiasm and generous aspirations of men ; for surely the deep and Divine soul of humanity is not yet dead. Every one may at least set his own face as flint against that grovelling idolatry of money which leads to such hellish atrocities as we have read of in the Congo State and in Putumayo, and may hold aloft, whenever opportunity affords, the true ideal of national greatness. A nation's life consists not in the abundance of the things that it possesses, but in the hearts and brains of its citizens, in pure affections, in elevated thoughts, in disinterested aims,

¹ *On the constitution of the Church and State*, p. 50, note.

in the clear conscience and the dedicated spirit, in the poet's vision and the prophet's fire. Let us beware how we lose sight of these things, lest we sink into that miserable state in which we invert the true order of our admiration, in which we call good evil, and evil good, and our glory is in our shame.

There is one insidious form of this evil on which a few words must be said, because it is assuming national proportions, and has become one of the most serious social dangers of our time. I refer to gambling in all its various shapes. To be forewarned is to be forearmed ; and it is well that we should look at this vice so as to understand it, and see clearly wherein its moral obliquity consists. It is not at once obvious that it is intrinsically wrong, and it is conceivable that a practice may be undesirable on account of its mischievous results, although considered simply in itself it may carry no taint of sin. Now, the terrible results of gambling are what most forcibly strikes the imagination. The craving for it becomes an uncontrollable passion ; and the splendid saloons that used to flourish on the Continent to beguile men into this sordid practice have been the scenes of terrible tragedies, when men goaded on by this blind infatuation have lost their all, and found ruin and guilty despair instead of the golden store which they dreamed their luck might bring them. Such haunts of gilded vulgarity are suppressed by law ; but no law seems able to stop the speculating, the betting, and other kinds of gambling, which infect all classes of society, and again and again we have seen in the newspapers that the beginnings of crime were due to this depraved indulgence. On

purely prudential grounds, therefore, gambling in all its forms ought to be discouraged.

But no fear of results will keep men from a tempting practice which they do not believe to be intrinsically wrong, and it is, therefore, necessary to explore the moral roots from which this mischief grows. The evil of gambling does not lie in the hazard which attends it; for it is justly urged that in ordinary life risks must be continually incurred. A speculation in business may be wise or unwise; but the mere uncertainty of the result does not make it wrong. So, though it is very unwise for a man to stake his whole fortune on a gambler's chance, it is not foolish, for the sake of the pleasure which it brings, to stake what he can well afford to lose. If, then, gambling is not only unwise but wrong, we must look elsewhere for the source of the evil. Gambling springs ultimately from covetousness, and it is this which makes it, considered in itself and apart from all results, morally bad. The amount of covetousness lurking in it may be very small, and there may be many innocent elements mingled with it, which add to the pleasure it affords, and may be, in its early stages, most prominent in the thoughts; but it is in its essence governed by a desire to gain another's property without rendering an equivalent.

It differs from theft, inasmuch as you afford to others an equal chance of plundering you without returning an equivalent; but it springs from the same disposition, and often prepares the way for theft. It may seem a very small and innocent thing to join in the little hazards which are found to add zest to amusements. But a small seed may have a giant growth; and if there is any feeling

of pleasure in winning from another what you have not earned, the evil has begun, and the only safe course is to resist the beginnings of evil, and keep the purity of our aims untarnished. For wealth which has come to us through honourable toil we may be justly grateful, for we have added to the world's treasure, and received a recompense which is due ; but the successful gambler has made no increase of the world's possessions, but has appropriated a share to which he has no title, and which he has gained only through another's loss, sometimes through widespread ruin and misery—and all such gain is defilement.

We must take heed, then, and beware of covetousness. Our prayer for ourselves and for all men must be that, however great may be our material resources, our treasure of heart and mind may be greater still, and that we may so value that spiritual treasure as to feel its incomparable worth, and be raised above all temptation to barter our soul's honour for all that this world could offer. Thus may we prove our fidelity to him who came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and who taught us that it is more blessed to give than to receive.

CHAPTER VII

LIKENESS TO GOD

IN enforcing his commandment to love even one's enemies Jesus refers to the universal love of God, and then appeals to his disciples to be perfect as their Father in heaven is perfect. These words clearly indicate a very exalted conception of the nature and capacities of mankind. Did they proceed from other lips than his who represented to us in human form the Divine perfections we might well deem them presumptuous ; but coming as they do from him who knew what was in man, and who not only preached but lived a life of ideal righteousness, they awe us into reverence, and afford us strange glimpses into the mysteries of our being. The soul, poor and mean as it may often appear, is nevertheless allied to God ; and as the tiniest dewdrop may flash back the beams of the rising sun, so the soul, though breaking the pure white lustre into coloured rays, is yet lighted by the Spirit of the Eternal. It has been created for everlasting progress towards the Divine perfections. From feeblest commencement it struggles towards its full-grown strength ; and even in this life we see enough to fill us with amazement, if once we can detach ourselves from the blinding

influence of habit, and recognize the wonders of that which is common. Who that looked for the first time on the helplessness of an infant could suppose that he was one of a race which had been distinguished by the discoveries of Newton, the poetry of Shakespeare, the loving zeal and comprehensive faith of Paul, and the delicate spiritual insight of John ? Yet in that feeble form there is a force which no man can measure, a life too full of mystery for our wisest sages to decipher.

Provide the requisite conditions, and by an inherent energy it will gather to itself the suitable elements of growth, gradually unfold the most varied powers, and bear at last the impress of intelligence, wisdom, and goodness. And to the progress of the soul, so marked and rapid in the early period of life, we can assign no natural limit. It is indeed at present mysteriously dependent on the body, and shares largely in its vicissitudes ; but so long as the body is maintained in health, so as to fulfil its office as the temporary dwelling and organ of the spirit, there is no reason why the mind should not continually acquire a more extensive knowledge, a more exalted faith, and a goodness which would more truly reflect the Divine benignity. We are intended for an unceasing progress, and there is no moment when the soul, like the body, is full-grown, and has nothing higher to attain. Not for an indolent bliss, but for perpetual ascent towards God, were we gifted with immortality, and our deepest wisdom and purest goodness here are but the earnest of the glory that shall be revealed in us.

Yet it would seem that the majority of mankind have not yet awakened to the dignity of their nature, or formed any distinct idea of spiritual

progress. When, as the phrase goes, their education is completed, they remain nearly the same from year to year, the old prejudices undiminished, old temptations unbaffled, old passions unsubdued ; and instead of expatiating into new fields of knowledge, rising to the apprehension of higher principles, disengaging themselves from the trammels of accidental association, and humbly feeling their way towards a larger life, they are apt, with the foolishness of pride, to boast of the narrow enclosure which they occupy and the stifling atmosphere which they breathe. They either deem themselves already perfect, or at least do not hunger and thirst after a more excellent righteousness. This apathy in regard to spiritual progress arises in no small degree from the lowness of the standard by which we measure our attainments.

We are continually tempted to estimate our deserts by the average rule of goodness in the world ; and this we do, not through any formal purpose, but through those subtle workings of the heart of which we become conscious only in the light of a higher Spirit. It may be our intention to judge ourselves by the severe laws of conscience ; and yet, through a secret vanity we are elated at our pre-eminence if we rise but a little above the ordinary level. Now this rule denotes, from the very nature of the case, only that mediocrity of goodness which it is easy for us to attain, and furnishes no incentive to further advancement. It relieves our sense of want, touches no consciousness of sin, and paints no visions of ideal beauty. If we are content with the judgment of our fellow men, and never apprehend the spiritual law of which that judgment is but a faint and incomplete

expression, we shall inevitably relax our efforts, and cease to press on towards the perfect man.

It may be said, however, that the average level of human goodness is gradually rising, and therefore presents even to those who never look beyond it sufficient ground for a progressive improvement. I rejoice to believe it ; but we must not forget that the slow elevation of the popular conscience and sentiment is effected only through the unremitting exertions of men who have regard to a higher rule, and refuse to be judged by the current maxims of their day. If there were none of independent energy, of nobler aspiration and clearer vision than the multitude, the world would make no progress, and the manifestation of the sons of God would still be as distant as in the days of Paul. Prophets and sages have left their mark upon history, and permanently exalted human hopes and character, because they forsook the vulgar morals of the crowd, and sought for truth and duty through a holier inspiration than the breath of popular opinion. And we, too, if we would fulfil the intrinsic law of our being, and reach that excellence of which we are capable, must look, not to that which is beneath, but to that which is above us, and judge ourselves, not by the imperfect patterns around us, but by the pure ideal within us. With our eyes fixed upon earth we shall inevitably sink, and our souls be dwarfed and contracted ; but if they be lifted to the infinite heavens, we shall rise and expand, and, forgetting the hot and misty plain which once we occupied, we shall behold an ever clearer light, breathe a more invigorating air, and receive a diviner life.

Now according to the teaching of Christ the

true goal of human endeavour can be found in nothing short of the perfection of God. It is towards him that our eye must be directed ; and it is in the contemplation of his glories, whether as seen in the works of nature, or in the course of Providence, or in the brighter flashes of his Spirit in the hearts of men, that our only worthy ideal is to be formed. This doctrine is not dependent on a casual precept, but is implied throughout the teaching of Christ, it being his purpose to bring the soul and God into conscious harmony, and to sanctify the heart as a temple of the Holy Spirit. The thought is taken up and repeated by his disciples :—‘ Be ye followers of God as dear children ’ ; ‘ Be ye holy, for I am holy ’ ; ‘ That ye might be partakers of the Divine nature ’ ; ‘ God dwelleth in him, and he in God ’ :—these are the words in which the first believers describe the end and purpose of life.

To any precept enjoining so high an aim it may be objected that it is unpractical, and therefore unwise and useless. The Divine perfection is a goal which no man can reach, a height which immortality can never climb ; and what men need is a plain rule, by whose letter they may be guided, and which it is possible for them to obey. This may be true in relation to a certain stage of culture, and before we can enter the higher sphere of the moral life we must learn simply to obey. But still the law, with its precise commands for the regulation of our conduct, is not adapted to be our final teacher, but is intended as a temporary aid to lead us to Christ, that he, as a quickening spirit, may dwell within us, and purify the inmost fountains of our nature. The most characteristic

precepts of Christianity relate to an ideal morality, enjoining that of which human nature appears to be incapable, and yet indicating the point towards which we ought to be continually moving. It will not admit the shadow even of a dark thought ; it insists upon a love which no hostility or injustice can ruffle ; it demands a trust which is superior to all anxiety, and a single-minded devotion to the supreme will which deems itself sullied by the intrusion of any self-interested, vain, or ambitious suggestions.

But this teaching, representing to us our nature as it exists in the mind of God, is not lost upon us because at present its requirements seem to be impracticable. For, in the first place, though we must always come short of our desires, yet our attainments bear some proportion to the loftiness of our aim ; and if we can be content with nothing but perfection, we are animated by a noble restlessness, and continually press forward to new achievements. He who fixes his eye upon the sunlit peak, and, despising the dangers and difficulties of the way, attempts the rugged ascent, may fail of his desired object ; but at least he reaches a higher eminence, and surveys a grander prospect, than he who, rendered sceptical by his fears or indolence, remains in ignominious comfort below. They who take an unworthy view of their destiny fall short even of that poor conception. You must believe greatly, and strive greatly, if you would prove the real capacity of your nature ; and he who expects little, and attempts little, accomplishes nothing. And again, the greatness of the end which we propose to ourselves is important, not only by making our actual attainments higher than

they would otherwise be, but still more by giving the true direction to our efforts.

In the formation of our characters we have to consider not only how far we can realize that type which we endeavour to imitate, but also which type is the most worthy of imitation. If we start upon a wrong track, the more brilliant our progress, the more disastrous our ultimate failure, and it is better to crawl upon the right course than to rush with giant strides upon the wrong one. There is a type of character infinitely holy, just, and loving, a character before whose majesty we must ever bow, whose perfection we cannot fathom, much less attain, and whose glory mortal brows may never wear, but which, nevertheless, we may worship, in whose fullness we may feast our souls, and whose lineaments we may on the tiny page of our life imperfectly transcribe. There may be many a blot, and many a crooked and trembling line; but the image will be different from all others, bearing a character of its own, and, in spite of its unworthy execution, representing, not the worldly or the selfish, but the Divine. Who cannot see that we thus obtain the true direction for our efforts? Our progress may be slow. But as soon as we turn to the Lord, though the distance be infinite, his light gleams across our faces, and begins to change us into the same image from glory to glory. Oh! that men would choose this path which leads to eternal life, and whose atmosphere is the Holy Spirit of our Father; for every other path must be retraced in penitence and sorrow, and this alone assures us of undying progress, and a destiny grander than earth's ambition has ever pictured in its wildest dreams.

YOUTH AND AGE

As once the sun from night's dark mansion sprung,
And youth stood radiant in his golden car,
And, through the vast and silent shadows, flung,
Hope's joyful glance, prophetic gleams, afar ;

So now in purple splendours evening falls,
And age looks calmly on the softening light,
And hopes, whene'er the solemn angel calls,
Eternal day will follow transient night.



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AUTHOR

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Drummond, J.

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The way of life.

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